

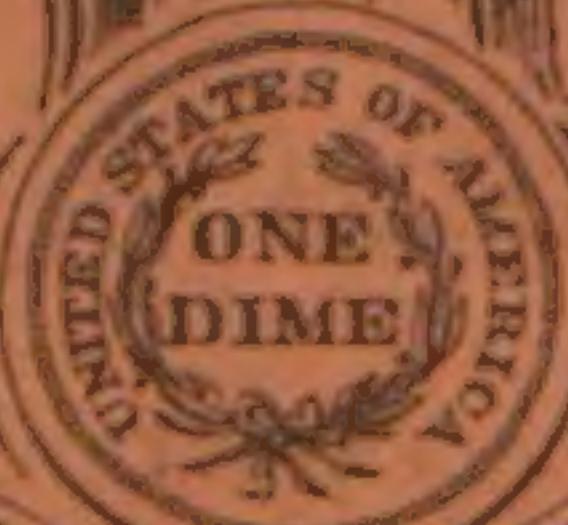
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BEADLE'S

NUMBER 35.

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EAST AND WEST,



OR THE
Beauty of Willard's Mill.

BEADLE AND COMPANY.

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EAST AND WEST,



BY MRS. FRANCES FULLER BARRITT.

BEADLE AND COMPANY,
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EAST AND WEST;

OR, THE

BEAUTY OF WILLARD'S MILL.

CHAPTER I.

“THE STAKE IS WILLARD'S MILL.”

“WHAT do you say to making the old man pull down his mill?”

“I say he's got to do it—that is, the dam. If we get rid of the dam, I guess the mill will take care of itself.”

“I say, d—n the dam!”

The group laughed at this rough witticism; it was a reckless-looking set of men, who were talking around the tavern fire—not so coarse as they were lawless, with that air of adventure and bravado, which spoke of a new country and a half-civilized way of living.

It was an evening in early spring, chilly and wet; the wind whistled around the newly-erected building, and found plenty of ingress through unplastered walls and ill-fitting windows. It caused every lounger on the one street of the new “town,” who had no home of his own, to seek the light and warmth of this tavern bar-room, where there was a roaring fire and abundance of liquor for his comfort. Lawyers left their little shanties, dignified by the shingles which marked them as “offices;” land-agents, the two young doctors of the place, teamsters, boatmen, and one or two new-comers thronged the room, making business lively for the bar-tender.

Half a dozen of this company were discussing the subject of Willard's Mill. They had bought lots in the new “city;” and now that the spring rains were falling, they found their lots under water; and the smooth, persuasive land-agents had convinced them that the mischief lay all at the door of

Willard's Mill—or rather, at the dam. The dam made back-water, and the back-water was the cause of the lots overflowing—if they could get the owner to take it away, matters would be "all right."

A delegation had gone once and offered to purchase the mill, for the purpose of destroying it, but their offer had been refused by the owner. They were very angry about it. They knew, perfectly, that they had not promised him half what his property was really worth; and that a part of the payment was to be in town lots which he did not want; they knew the bargain would ruin him—nevertheless, they were very angry; and they were a disagreeable and dangerous set of men to have for enemies.

"The old fellow's no business to be so obstinate," said one, with that kind of a malicious laugh which betrayed his knowledge of the selfishness of their own proceedings.

"He ought to take what he can get, and be thankful!"

"Oh, of course. If he don't like it, he can lump it."

"He's *got* to do it!" reiterated the first speaker, with an oath. "We'll make him one more offer and if he don't accept it, we'll make him repent of it."

"We'll pull down the dam."

"And fire the mill."

"And run away with the miller's pretty daughter!"

Hardly were the words out of the last speaker's mouth, before a tall, sinewy-looking young man, dressed in a blouse and fustian breeches—who had been sitting quietly by the fire, apparently engaged in counting the number of blazing logs, but really listening to the conversation—sprung to his feet, and with one sudden and well-planted blow in the face, knocked the joker down, and strode out into the rain.

"Who did it?" gasped the victim, as he picked himself up, amid the jeers and merriment of his pitiless friends.

"I think it was Nat Arnold—one of Willard's mill-hands," said the bar-keeper. "I'm pretty sure it was him."

"Oh ho! likely he considered he had the first claim on the daughter. You must be careful how you joke too freely, my friends, in a mixed company."

"Let's have a game of euchre," said the sufferer, quite willing to turn the subject from his misfortune. "Come, you

three—let's play for Willard's Mill. If you and your partner win, we'll give the old fellow a fair chance—if I and my partner win, we'll take the mill without consulting the owner."

A pack of cards, like a drink of whisky, are always at hand in a new western town; the four men drew their chairs together, with a shingle between them for a table; others gathered about to watch the progress of the game, the stake of which belonged to neither party—and so they played for the fate of Willard's Mill.

The fate of the mill! There were human destinies locked up in its fortunes, and the gamesters played the game of life and death, in their carousal on that dark night.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAWN'S COVERT.

THERE is no romance about a squatter's cabin, whatever story-writers may have taken the liberty to say to the contrary.

Here is a picture of one, which may stand as a sample for thousands of others. A square log-hut, with a door in the middle of one side, a single sash of window in the opposite wall, a large open fire-place at one end. Facing this, in the interior, will stand the bed or beds of the family. Usually, in a corner near the fire-place is standing a ladder, with its upper end reaching up through a square hole in the floor of the "loft," which is simply the narrow space between the "joists" and the roof, and is floored with loose boards. Whatever of the family effects can not be hung on pegs or hooks fastened into the joists underneath, or stored away in chests shoved under the beds, are consigned to this "loft"—even an occasional visitor. Quite frequently there is a shed or "lean-to" built on to that end of the house opposite the chimney, as a receptacle for barrels of meat, flour, corn, stores of vegetables, *et cetera*. Some insignificant out-houses, of a size and pattern corresponding with the family residence, are scattered about

wherever convenience suggests ; though it may happen, in the case of a stock-grower, that the out-buildings are superior in appearance to the dwelling-house.

Set down such a cabin as this close upon the bank of a deep creek, whose winding course through the wide Missouri bottom-lands is marked by a scattering fringe of willows, about half way between the river it flows into and the bluffs where it rises ; put a water-mill of very ordinary unpicturesqueness a few rods below the house, and a rude bridge over the creek between, and you have the principal features of the scene of our story. Add, however, for detail, a tiny island in the creek, just before the door, covered with young cottonwood trees and planted with a few common flowers. A floating bridge of an old flat-boat affords passage to this miniature garden, while a row-boat or two are generally moored along its border. If you are a close observer, you will see a rude bench against the shed, on which is a small iron kettle—the family wash-basin when the ampler one of the creek is not used. If you are a *critical* observer, you will stop to examine some charcoal drawings on the white-washed chimney, whose outside surface, like its inside capacity, is enormous.

Not a tree nearer than two miles, except those young cottonwoods on the island, and the willows along the creek ! No fences either ; nothing but the wide and endless bottom-prairie, waving with the tall yellow grass of last year which has escaped the annual burning.

Over this singular but not unattractive landscape, has dropped the purple evening—the sky, which bends over like a great dome touching the prairie all around, showing here and there a star. The damp, soft wind of early spring goes by with a fluttering sound, at once soothing and lonesome.

But not the darkness, the lonesomeness, nor the more dangerous dampness of the air, startled from her hiding-place the "Prairie Fawn," as the miller's only daughter was called by the few neighboring squatters, and her father's mill-hands. Nestled in a covert of dry grass on the furthermost side of the tiny island, Minnie Willard was holding communion with her own thoughts, and dreaming strange, impossible dreams—she knew not how impossible—of the glorious future. What were her dreams it is not relevant here to relate. All that could

have been observed by one having the secret of her retreat would have been a manner so shy yet watchful, an appearance of being "all eyes and ears," that would fully have justified the sobriquet of "fawn" which had attached to her.

What she now heard and saw, herself unheard and unseen, was a party down at the mill, consisting of her father's sawyer, Nat Arnold, two other hands, and her own brother Frank, preparing spears and torches for a fishing excursion up the creek. She knew, when she heard Frank's voice, that there was company in the cabin, but she preferred to sit there in the dark, watching the weird picture made by the men working in the glare of the torches, rather than to join in the family talk which she guessed was going on within.

As the men worked eagerly at some job they were in haste to dispatch, she was absorbed in noticing how strongly their swarthy features were brought out in the ruddy glow of the pitch, how their red woolen shirts seemed just suited to the figures and the light, what a fine handsome fellow her brother Frank was, and how little Nat Arnold's face and figure suffered by comparison. If she could only give colors with charcoal, she would try to reproduce that scene on the chimney to-morrow.

As she gazed, the picture suddenly dissolved, and its several parts came rapidly toward the house.

"Come, now, hurry up, boys! We'll make better headway with the old flat-boat than with the others. John and Charley can pole along, while you and I, Nat, attend to the spearing."

"I'd like to try my hand at a pickerel," muttered John.

"You'd do better trying your jaws on one in the morning," replied Frank.

"So now, get your torches set right in the for'ard end and push her along out, quick."

"Here we go!"

"No we don't; she's tied up to something on the island," said Nat.

"Give us a little light here, Charley—stand aside there—bless us! what have we got here?"

"You didn't think I should let you carry off my bridge, did you, Frank?" asked Minnie, quietly smiling at the surprise of all.

"It's well you broke cover just as you did, little fawn, or you might have spent the night here," cried her brother, just a little vexed at the detention. "Out in the night-air bare-headed, too! Take care that I don't scold you, Minnie!"

"You don't call *that* bare-headed, do you, Frank?" whispered Nat, as the young girl stepped lightly but in no haste into the boat, showing her lithe form enveloped half-way down in a mantle of rippling brown hair.

"I'm so used to your scolding, Frank, that I rather like it," said Minnie, looking round pleasantly upon all the men, but noticing no one in particular. "I wish you all good luck with your fishing."

Whatever Frank might have said which Minnie would *not* like was cut short by the family now appearing at the door with the question:

"Where is Minnie? Frank have you seen Minnie?"

"We started some such game just now over on the island. Mother, you had better look after the ways of your daughter, before she gets quite to living like an owl. But good-evening, good folks; you shall breakfast on pickerel. Shove her off there, boys. Heave-ho! here we go, at last."

Minnie lingered in the door-way, watching the picturesque fishing-party as the red torch-lights revealed them at every turn of the creek, until, becoming interested in what was being said by one of the visitors, she noiselessly closed the door and joined the circle round the fire, which, more for light and cheer than for warmth, was kept burning through the spring evenings.

"Waal, as I was sayin'," continued the speaker, Frank's mother-in-law, "if Mr. Willard goes to Grove to-morrow he'll git a letter from some of your folks. You can depend upon it; my dreams never fail to come true when I have this sort of feelin' about 'em. 'Twas just so when Gleason was writ to about losin' his property in the east, I dreamed it all out afore we got the letter, and I read that letter in my sleep afore it ever come from the office. An' 'twas just so when Frank went down to Missouri 'fore Gleason's death; I knew when he was a comin' home as well as if I'd seen with my real eyes. Gleason allus had faith in my dreams, and they allus come true, when I *felt* they would; and you'll git a letter from your people that will concern you mightily."

For a brief space no one made answer. Minnie's father sat gazing silently into the fire, which lighted up pleasantly his kind and ruddy countenance, shining with a half-thoughtful, half-amused smile. Mrs. Willard senior, and Frank's fair-haired wife, mused over their knitting. Minnie, with a great expression of interest in her childish face, crept in between her mother and Mrs. Gleason.

"Did you see what was in the letter?" she asked, eagerly.

"It wasn't very clear, not near so plain as some; but some of your folks is a comin' out here, an' that pretty soon."

Mrs. Willard sighed, and her husband's face grew more thoughtful.

"Oh, I hope it's my cousin Constance," murmured Minnie, with suppressed enthusiasm.

"I don't see what makes you wish that;" and Mrs. Willard sighed again.

"Because she's so accomplished, and knows so much about the world."

"That's just the reason we wouldn't want her to come here, I should say, Minnie. What could we do with an elegant city girl—put her in the loft to sleep?"

"Oh, dear," cried the anxious yet eager child, "I wish we had the new house done!"

"But the new house is only on paper yet, and so we can not offer your cousin a room in that."

Two great tears rolled over the soft oval of Minnie's cheeks, and she pulled the vail of "bronze-brown hair" more closely about the eyes whose color was only a shade darker, and truly as gentle in expression as the wild fawn's from which she had taken her pet name.

"If she comes visiting poor folks she must take poor folks' fare," suggested Olive, Frank's wife.

"An' if she's as sensible as you think she is accomplished, Minnie, she'll be content to share your 'bed and board,'" Frank and Mrs. Gleason, seeing the disconsolate looks of the young girl.

"Her mother had all the pride of all the Willards in her veins," sighed again Minnie's mother. "She didn't like us when we were better off, because we were too humble—I don't know what her children will think now."

"Oh waal, never mind now, Zara," said Mrs. Gleason, addressing Mrs. Willard by her Christian name; "like as if she'll turn out to be a real pleasant-mannered girl, and not a bit proud. It's often just so with proud people's children—they see so much on it at home that they git kind of set against high notions themselves. 'Twas so with some of Gleason's relations in Pennsylvania—some of 'em ha' I been bro't up in Philadelfy—they was just as nice-behaved young folks as ever I see."

"For my own part," said Minnie, "I think my cousin ought to be proud, and I shall be disappointed if she isn't; I'm sure I should be so if I had only half as much reason."

Whether this view of Minnie's sentiments relieved Mrs. Willard's mind of some secret apprehensions, or whether she really doubted whether there was any cause for so much speculation at all, her good spirits were restored, apparently, and she said, laughing:

"It is great folly to be talking in this way about Amy's children before we have occasion. Perhaps it's my old and I sister that's coming, or some distant relation we none of us would worry over."

"I should like to see Amy's children, and like to treat them well," spoke Mr. Willard, when the question had been passed by the others, and still gazing absently into the fire; "she was a fine woman—a very fine, large-souled woman, though she was rather willful, and spoiled by us all. Yes, Amy's children would certainly be welcome." Then pausing again while the women talked of other matters—"Zara, how long is it since we have heard from Amy?"

"I think it's more than three years," said Mrs. Willard.

"Well, I can not go to the Grove to-morrow—that's the head-workman to be here who is to settle some questions about the new house; but the day after I can go, I think, and don't fail to let me know if any thing is wanted."

"I'll give you a memorandum," said Mrs. Willard; and Minnie looked wistfully at her mother as if she would like to put down an item or two—ignorant, poor child, that the things she coveted would have made her cousin Constance envious. But she was accustomed to self-denial even in such small matters;

so she had soon abandoned her secret wish, and returned to the quiet discussion of some neighborly matters with Frank's wife, while the elder women talked of household subjects.

Late in the evening the fishing-party were heard returning, and Olive and her mother hurried on their shawls and hoods to be ready to go the instant Frank called for them, having a walk of a mile to perform before sleeping. Minnie was watching her chance, however, to speak to her brother, and in reply to his hail, presented herself at the door with a "Come in a minute, Frank, won't you?"

"No, my little owl, I can not. 'Duty before pleasure,' as the monkey said, when he painted his tail sky-blue. Tell Olive to hurry. Hurrah the house! Here's your nice, fine pickerel!"

Having shown his social disposition by making all the noise he could, Frank started on with a couple of huge fish as his share of the spoils, and had got as far as the bridge over the creek, when his disengaged arm was nervously seized by some one from behind.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, with a real start.

"Oh Frank, cousin Constance is coming to see us!"

"Who told you so?"

"Why, nobody—you see—why, you know about Mrs. Gleason's dream?"

"Little goose! go home to nest, and let us do the same."

"But, Frank—"

"Pshtoo, pshtoo, ps-h-o-o!" and with that he ran quite away.

The last embers of the fire had quite died out before Minnie had ceased building Spanish castles in them that night; and the castle-building still went on in her dreams in even a grander style than when waking.

While Minnie dreamed, her parents slumbered near her, and the snoring of the hands in the "mill-room" was harmonized by the sound of falling water; the soft spring wind kept up its fluttering, and the stars that multiplied in the midnight heavens held their images broken into countless splinters of light on the ripples of the creek. Toward morning the moon in its last quarter balanced its pearl-shell boat a moment on a peak of the bluffs, then floated off upon the dark blue heaven beside the morning star. Only the sly little prairie-wolf,

stealing out to sup upon some sleepy chicken, or even to gather the crumbs about the squatter's doorway, of all the life in that world of wildness, seemed alive to the beauty of the lonely night. Dream on, gentle fawn of the prairie! your last child's slumber is upon you now: to-morrow you will be a child no more.

CHAPTER III.

THE EXPECTED COUSIN.

"I wish you would wait here a week, Constance; I really can not get time to go with you sooner. I must be quick, you know, with my prospecting; there's plenty of men ahead of me now, and the choice locations are fast being taken up. Since we've risked the little we had left us, we must not hesitate or lose time; so just content yourself here for a few days till I can go down to our uncle's with you, there's a girl girl!" and the young man speaking looked quite entreatingly into the half-averted face of his sister, where, seeing nothing very terrible, he ventured to pinch a little redness into the clear waxen paleness of her lovely cheek.

"Nonsense, Charles!—talk about contenting myself in such a place as this? Why I could not stay here another day to save my life!"

"Oh, if it amounts to *that*, you must go, of course; but ten to one you will find far worse accommodations where you are going. Uncle Willard probably lives just like the people along the road we have traveled—it's the fashion of the country."

Constance Lord turned her eyes on her brother, full of a scornful wonder to hear him speak so.

"And he a Willard!"

"To be sure! Oh, you'll make a famous pioneer, my queenly sis!" said the young man, laughing delightedly at the imaginary discomfiture in store for the high-bred sister he both loved and feared.

Constance kept her face turned to the window in silence for

some moments, then suddenly throwing herself on her brother's breast with a sob :

"Yes, I will, Charlie; I am ready for any thing—even a log-cabin! I am afraid to stay in this noisy hotel, and you away. Let me go to uncle Willard's—please?"

"When a woman wills, she will, and there's an end on't," said Charlie, though he kissed his sister very tenderly.

"But I do not ask you to sacrifice your time; I only want your consent, and a safe horse to ride. By the way, the landlord has a pony that I fancy very much—a swift, easy-going, pretty creature; just get me that pony, and directions about the road, and Constance Lord will show you whether she is not of the stuff that pioneers are made of."

"Whew! I should think so. Will you ride booted and spurred, with pistols in belt, my fair *Amazon*?"

"I will ride habited, hatted and plumed," laughed Constance; "and I shall make no objection to a pistol, if it isn't loaded."

"Just to scare away any chance admirer? But are you in sober earnest, Constance?"

"Yes indeed, in utter, dead earnest!"

"Well then, it is time you were off, for I have got to leave you in half an hour. I will inquire about the pony; tho' I wouldn't trust you for this excursion if you were not a good horsewoman. *Au revoir!*"

The result of the inquiry was that in twenty minutes Constance was mounted in front of their hotel, taking leave of her brother and also of another gentleman with whom they seemed familiarly acquainted.

"I wish you were going along, Fletcher," said Charles Lord, uneasily.

"That's just what I was wishing, Charlie. I've got some business down below Willard's Mill, and meant to go down in a day or two. I believe I'll go, any how; it won't take me long to be ready."

"Good-bye! now I shall rest more comfortably. Constance, you can ride on at an easy gait till Fletcher overtakes you. Hold in your pony a little at the start. Fletcher will bring me word how you like it down there. Good-bye now, and don't get into any trouble!"

Constance squeezed her brother's hand rather tightly, but nodded her plumed head gayly at him and his companion as she put her pony into a dashing gallop in the direction of the open prairie.

"If she rides that way I shall not overtake her at all," said Fletcher, as he turned to the office to order his horse.

"Oh, she's only showing off—she couldn't help that, you know," returned young Lord; "but make haste; and good-bye to you, my friend—the stage is waiting for me."

And so the young fortune-hunter went his way, while his proud and beautiful sister went another, with equal fearlessness. The morning was bright and bracing, the scenery novel, and the occasion romantic. What more does youth require to inspire it with enthusiasm!

Constance found herself, after her smart gallop, quite alone in the midst of the long, level bottom, miles from any house, though here and there, far ahead of her, could be seen single settlers' cabins; for in the rarified air of these prairies distant objects appeared as plainly as nearer ones—a fact which she had already learned.

She was beginning to fear she had out-rode her escort altogether, and to moderate her pace, taking time for observation.

"It is glorious to be so free!" she exclaimed, exultingly. "I never knew before what freedom was. No, I should think not!" she added, with a gay laugh. "Here am I, a fashionable young woman of two-and-twenty, taking a morning ride of as many miles, alone over the 'trackless prairie,' in search of lost relations. I wonder (*to see*) what poor mamma would have thought?"

"It is grand, though, this endless river-meadow, with bluffs on either side as wild as mountains if not as lofty; and this crystal air—there's nothing in the States to compare with it. Get up, my Rosinante!" she cried, touching her pony smartly with the whip; "but not so, either, Rosy; I beg your pardon; we have to wait for our escort; and if he does not soon appear, we shall miss the family dinner-hour."

"Behold, here are two roads, looking like two gray ribbons on the green and yellow of Dame Nature's spring toilette, and as they both float off in nearly the same direction, (as if the old dame had got her streamers in a flutter with the German.)

I don't know which is the clue to Willard's Mill. Are you any wiser, Rosy?—because I don't fancy getting lost just to-day, all pony, if Harry Stewart is a fop and a fool."

With this last sentence, the gay, girlish voice, that had seemed to sport on the elastic air as if speaking were a pleasure and not an everyday necessity, sunk down to a piteous tremble, very much as if its owner meant to cry.

But the weakness was only momentary, and with one brave effort Constance Lord was "herself again," as she inwardly declared.

"Now, Rosy, they tell us up at Kanesville to take the right-hand road all the time; but I have no faith in it; for, you see, don't you, Rosy, that the right-hand road turns off too much toward the river, while according to description, Willard's Mill is in the middle of the prairie. So here's for conviction against advice—we'll try the left-hand road, which looks much more as if it went somewhere. There's a house, too, a mile or more ahead, so we can not get quite lost."

Giving the pony a second touch of the whip, our gay traveler rode on until the house desired was reached—a story-and-a-half log-cabin, rather newer and neater than most of such houses. As she dashed up to the door she scattered a group of tow-headed children, but they quickly disposed of themselves so as to get a good view of their visitor, and waited in silence to learn her errand. A young-looking woman, with sunburst, light hair and complexion, red cheeks, and pretty features, appeared in the doorway in answer to an inquiry from Constance for the mother of the children.

"Can you tell me the road to Willard's Mill?" asked our traveler, in a self-possessed tone.

"Well, yer not far away from it now," answered the woman, glibly; "but if yer'd kept ter the right a little farther back yer'd saved yerself a good bit o' ridin'."

"You don't mean to say I must return to the place where the roads forks, and take the other one?" cried Constance, rather dismally.

"No, if yer don't want ter. There's a nearerer way nor that; but it's kin o' low an' wet, an' the bridge across the stream ain't very safe neither; but I reckon it'll bear yer pony."

The pioneer spirit which had vaunted itself two hours ago began to fail upon hearing this information, when the woman continued :

"My boy here can show yer the way across to the other road. Here, Ike, go 'long o' this lady, an' show her the track ter the mill road."

"Oh, thank you very much," answered Constance, joyfully, as the eldest of the tow-heads came slyly forward ; and the pioneer spirit rose again.

"I reckon yer have come from Kanesville?" queried the woman, eyeing the elegant riding-costume of her visitor with admiring curiosity.

"Yes," answered Constance, guessing that her questioner esteemed Kanesville the metropolis of the world ; "I came from that city this morning."

"Waal, it's likely Kanesville's improvin' mighty fast since the New Territory's makin' sich a blow. But yer mayn't be long up ter Kanesville, I'm thinkin'?"

"Why do you think I do not?" asked Constance, willing to sound the woman's opinion of her.

"Oh, I've seen near 'pon all the Kanesville big-bugs—an' there's some powerful smart ones, too—but yer ain't one o' them. Yer from Illinois, mebbe, or St. Louis?"

"No, you haven't guessed it yet," said Constance, smiling.

"P'raps yer from Pittsburg, then, or like enough from Virginia?"

"What if I was to tell you that I was from New York?" asked the now thoroughly-amused traveler.

"Waal, that's a good bit off; from Rochester, mebbe. I had an aunt lived in Rochester oncet."

At this the merriment of Constance broke forth in laughter.

"You do not understand me," she exclaimed ; "I came from New York city."

"Sure!" ejaculated the woman, a faint shade of perplexity on her pleasant face. "Waal, we hev folks here from a-mu-s-all parts, and likely some from your town; but," she added, with renewed curiosity, "you hain't come all the way from York on that 'are pony?"

"No, indeed; I hired this pony up at Kanesville, and right well I like him."

"I was watchin' ov yer comin' down the road at such a fine canter, an' I said ter my boy, 'that woman rides as if she was born on horseback;' so when yer said yer was from York, I reckoned mebbe yer'd rode out here on that beast."

"Oh, no; we New Yorkers are not such famous riders as all that," laughed Constance, in a tone which acknowledged the compliment to her riding; "but I thank you very much for the offer of a guide; and now I think my pony has blown long enough; so, good-by."

"Good-by ter yer. Ike, yer go as far as the lady wants yer."

Constance nodded her plumes gracefully to the group in the doorway—for, by this time all the tow-heads were clustered about the yellow-haired mother—and followed at a gentle pace her light-footed guide through the tall grass of last year, which, in the wetter portions of the prairie, had escaped the annual burning; and, though dry and lifeless, stood erect, and higher than the boy's head. Silent as an Indian, lithe and sprightly, Ike conveyed himself by a flapping motion of his arms, very suggestive of wings, over places where the pony and his rider were in danger of sticking fast.

"So much for trusting conviction against advice," murmured Constance, softly. "It isn't the first time, either; but possibly I may learn something after a while;" and the frown which contracted the delicate brows looked exceedingly determined.

"There's the sloo bridge, mum," said Ike, directly, stopping to see how the pony came over it.

The sagacious little animal tried the crazy structure very cautiously, and his rider's heart stood still as she felt how it sank under them; but the pony gained in assurance at each step, and finally ambled easily over.

"You're a knowing creature, Rosy," said Constance, patting his neck; "I shall like you too much to part from you before we've had many days' travel together." Then, seeing that Ike was waiting, as if for orders, she asked: "Are there no more rough or miry places on my road?"

"Nun to be afeard of. Jist keep along this track till yer cum to the main road agin, and yer'll be all right."

"Thank you; here is something for your trouble, and I think you will be a fine man one of these days."

"'Twan't no trouble," answered Ike, pocketing the silver with boyish eagerness; then, nodding his tow-head lastily and bashfully, he set his slim bare feet into a run toward home.

"Eureka!" cried our traveler, five minutes later, as she emerged into the traveled road, and was doubly assured of being at last right by seeing two wagons loaded with lumber coming from the direction she was taking. "There is something from Willard's Mill—some of the raw material out of which squatters make cabins, and one of the Willards coins gold. Do your prettiest, now, Rosy, for I don't want to hear any smart speeches from those wagoners."

The drivers of the heavily-loaded wagons were quiet men enough, and politely turned their teams a little out of the road as the dashing rider sped past them at a full gallop. If Constance felt sure they looked after her, she did not turn her head for confirmation, but kept on at so rapid a pace that she could soon descry what she took to be her uncle's mill.

And now her thoughts began to take shape concerning the relatives she was seeking. What were her cousins like—brought up in this interminable prairie, with such people as the woman she had just parted from as their only neighbors, very likely. How did they live? She strained her eyes to make out the house, and her heart failed when she could only see the log-hut already familiar to the reader. Could it be possible they lived in that?—oh, no! doubtless that was the stable, and the house was further off. Yet there was no dwelling to be seen for a mile beyond, and the prairie could not conceal any thing taller than its own forest of grass. She began to regret having sought these friends, and to doubt if habits so different as theirs could make pleasant the association.

In the mean time, what had become of Fletcher Harris? He, too, was to have his adventure. Mounting his horse, and riding on briskly after his fair predecessor, expecting every instant to come in sight of her, and wondering why she did

not slacken her pony's pace, so that he might overtake her, he spurred over the whole twenty miles at a rate rather trying to his steed. He was fairly in sight of Willard's Mill before he gave up the chase; then he let the rein fall on his horse's neck with a feeling of pique at the courtesy of the lady—the idea of her being lost not occurring to him.

"I've nothing to do but to turn about and ride back again. Of course I will not intrude upon the family—they are strangers to me."

Flushed with the haste of his travel, he lifted his broad-brimmed hat from his head, as he gazed admiringly at the rosy mists just rolling from the distant bluffs; then, as he dropped his eyes from the distant heights, they fell upon a nearer loveliness, which fairly made the blood bound into his cheeks.

Fletcher was something of an artist; indeed, pen and pencil both entered into the insignia of his office; his present busyness in this far-away Western world, in which he was about as much of a novice as Constance Lord herself, was to prepare a series of sketches and articles for an illustrated periodical at the East. He was a careless, sarcastic man of the world, bright and keen—not wicked, not even reckless—but with that dashing grace of apparent folly which only ranks perfection in a certain set of young men, who illuminate the great metropolis with their rather astounding brilliancy. Of course he had a good opinion of himself, in a quiet way; and of course he had some reason for it. He had a ready wit—he was a constant contributor to a certain comic weekly—and many accomplishments, and that knowledge of others, which made him slip quietly into any place where he might be thrown. He was not rich, but his family and character were such that he had the *entrée* of some excellent society. Many a time he had walked along the fashionable promenades of New York, beside the same young lady whom he was now in search of under such unsuitable circumstances. It had been as pleasant as it was unexpected to Constance and her brother, their meeting him at the little hotel where the reader was first introduced to them.

But what was it which riveted his eyes as they dropped from the distant hills to the road before him?

By the tall grass of its margin, her apron full of small purple flowers, which she had wandered thus far away to gather, stood the Fawn of the Prairie. Thinking the approaching rider to be one of the rough neighbors who frequented her father's mill, she had given him no attention, until his abrupt pause in the road led her to glance up to see what was the matter. He had not, as yet, perceived her; and, lifting his hat from his head, as we have said, he remained lost for a few minutes in admiration of the day. Fletcher Harris never looked better than at that unconscious and unconstrained moment. The ease with which he sat in the saddle gave additional grace to his form; his cheeks were ruddy with exercise, and the wind made free with his wavy hair, blowing it about most audaciously. Witty and worldly-wise, and provoking and egotistical as he was in reality, he could not have seemed more perfect to this unsophisticated child, if he had dropped down out of paradise. Her great brown eyes were fastened upon his face so earnestly, that when his glance met hers, for her life she could not withdraw them, and thus, for an instant of time, he looked straight into her soul, and saw there all her innocent surprise and admiration.

If he had met one of his Fifth-avenue friends with anything at all startling in her fashionable attire, he would not have spared his criticism; but he did not feel at all like ridiculing the homely, old-fashioned dress of the pretty stranger—indeed, he thought its quaintness added to the interest of her fresh beauty.

"I have not had my ride in vain, after all," he thought. "I would ride twenty miles every morning to meet such a look from such a pair of eyes. Really, I didn't think there were any more such to be found."

The smile with which he watched the rapid blush rise to her cheeks, only deepened their color.

"Are you a daughter of Mr. Willard?" he asked, seeing that she was turning to the flowery grass again to escape his eyes.

"I am, sir," she answered, with sufficient dignity.

"I beg your pardon; but has there been a strange lady at your house this morning? I started from Kaneville to

esert her, and she has led me such a race as has nearly exhausted my poor horse. However, it's just like her!"

"My cousin Constance?" asked the young girl, catching her breath, and a bright look of pleasure breaking over her face.

"The same, Miss Willard. How long since she arrived?"

"We have not seen her," was the disappointed answer.

At that moment, the clatter of hoofs was heard behind them; they turned to look, and beheld a fair vision sweeping down upon them with waving plumes and fluttering ringlets.

"This is pretty treatment of a cavalier as devoted as myself," cried Mr. Harris, as she reined in her pony by his side.

"I've been lost—oh, dear! I was sorry for you, Mr. Harris, indeed I was, and for myself, too!" here she perceived the third person, who stood motionless by the roadside, with shy, admiring looks.

"Miss Willard, this is your expected cousin, Miss Constance Lord."

Minni stepped forward, and put her hand in the new relative's, who bent down and kissed her forehead lightly.

Then, too timid to speak, she hurried on, to give her father notice of the arrival.

Before Constance could dismount, Mr. Willard had hurried out to meet her.

"So this is Amy's daughter, is it? You are very like your mother, and are *very welcome*."

Something about this simple greeting, and the kind and genuine manner of it, went straight to the soft place in Constance's heart. She gave her uncle her cheek to kiss, and felt no reserve in doing so, but rather a daughter's confidence and affection.

The uncle and niece were at the cabin-door before they noticed that Fletcher Harris had again mounted his horse, and was bidding them good-day.

"Don't go yet, Fletcher. Uncle Willard, this is Mr. Harris, a friend of ours. Won't you ask him to stop a little with us all?"

"Oh, Mr. Harris, we can not let you go so soon, after

bringing us our niece; you must, at the least, stay for dinner. Just leave your horse there and come in; I'll have him stabled directly."

Fletcher accepted the invitation, and promised to come in after a few moments; but he had too much tact to intrude on the first meeting of Constance with her uncle's family.

It required no ceremony to approach them, for once the door was opened, the visitor confronted not only all the inmates, but every thing that made up the *regale* of that simple establishment. And it must be confessed that our city-bred guest experienced more embarrassment at the unaccustomed abruptness of this introduction, than if she had been ushered through any number of princely halls, lined with obsequious servants. If the corresponding embarrassment of her aunt and cousin were from exactly opposite causes, it was none the less apparent, and the meeting was constrained in spite of the mutual efforts of each to seem undisturbed at least. But Mrs. Willard was too sensible a woman to be startled from her sense of hospitality by the vision of beauty, elegance and fashion, which she was so unexpectedly called upon to entertain. She gently removed the plumed hat, and unfastened the riding-skirt, smoothed down with her neatly hands the wind-frayed, silken hair, and bestowed all those little attentions which go so far toward making friends of new acquaintances.

"And how is my sister Amy?" asked Mr. Willard, who had lingered to help along the first more formal talk.

Poor Constance! the question came upon her like an electric shock, bringing with it the vivid remembrance of past bitter sorrows. Gazing at her uncle with speechless confusion, she could think of no word of answer for some moments.

"Did you not get our letters?" she at length timidly ventured to say.

"We have not heard from you for three years," replied Mr. Willard, his accents broken by a sudden effort of emotion.

"Poor mamma died two years ago," was all that Constance could say, before tears came to her relief.

Mr. Willard jumped up and left the house precipitately. He was not the man to endure a witness to his grief; nor the man to refer to it ever afterward.

Melancholy as was this episode in the progress of their acquaintance, the aunt and niece felt that it was a new bond of sympathy; and while Mrs. Willard refrained from augmenting the sorrow of the orphan girl by useless questions relative to her bereavement, she succeeded in diverting her thoughts by directing them to other and present objects.

"I fear you will not find yourself very comfortable with us, Constance. It is so long that we have lived in this rude way, and suffered so much sickness, and had so many losses, that I ~~must~~ have *forgetfulness to be comfortable*, even were the means in my reach. But we want you to make known your wishes without reserve, and promise to comply with them as well as we are able. Now, don't go to saying any thing, for I know from some dim remembrances of my own, that this is very different from a civilized life!"

"Well, then, I promise to inform you when I find your ways quite unbearable," said Constance, with a return of her natural gaiety. "And as a sort of compromise, I shall require you to let me know when I become troublesome."

"We will take means to make you aware of that, should any thing so improbable happen; and to begin with, I am going to put you over here in this corner while I set the table for your dinner. We have to board the mill-hands, and they want their meals at early hours; but I shall not compel you to eat at their table, and their dinner is over for to-day. Take care of your beautiful dress, Constance, it will soon be spoiled with the dust of our cabin-floor. You see I could not wear pretty dresses, if I had ever so many, in such a place as this!"

Thus talking on, Mrs. Willard contrived to shorten the first appearance of distance between Constance and herself, by frankly owning the disadvantages of her situation; and the fastidious and fastidious governess girl was glad to find, in the simple speech and lack of conceit which her aunt's house afforded, a counter for an awkwardness of manner that pained her, as well as for any peculiarities of dress and living. She knew well enough that the plain, thin, sunburnt and care-burdened face had on it no beauty; nor had her dark eyes lost any of their youthful fire, nor her raven hair its blackness, during all the many years of hardship. But the once beautiful

tresses were combed back straight from the weather-browned temples, and no attempt at coiffure relieved the sharp outline of the delicate nose and chin. Nor did the short and narrow dress add any grace to the tall, spare figure, now slightly bent, and decidedly angular.

For a time Constance was so absorbed in making these observations, and in reflecting to what small compass the necessities of life could be narrowed down, that she had forgotten to wonder what had become of the young cousin whose small, cold fingers had been clasped for an instant only in her own, and who had mysteriously disappeared immediately afterward. She was about making inquiry concerning her, when the cabin-door was hastily thrown open and Nat Arnold appeared, assisted by one of the other hands, bearing the insensible form of Fletcher Harris between them.

"Here—lay him down right here on Minnie's bed," cried Mr. Willard, who followed close behind. "Zara, we must see what we can do—I'm afraid we've got a dead man here."

"Oh! what is the matter? Fletcher! Fletcher!" exclaimed Constance, terrified by the sight of the pale face and blood-clotted hair of the young man.

"Uncle, *how* did it happen?"

"He got hurt in the mill," was the brief reply. "We ought to have a doctor. Nat, saddle a horse—you'll have to take *his* horse, for mine are not up—and ride to the grove as if the devil was after you. Get Dr. Parker if you can; and if he's not at home, any body you can find. Tell 'em to hurry; but you'd better not come right back, but rest your horse, and inquire at the post-office for letters. Be quick, boy!"

These hurried orders were as hurriedly executed. It was four good miles to the Grove, though; and yet, in spite of the combined efforts of the family, the patient had given no signs of consciousness when Dr. Parker arrived, late in the afternoon.

"Severe concussion of the brain," said the doctor; "how did it happen?"

"The belt of a grindstone broke, and the stone, which was running very fast and was very warm, burst all to pieces and flew in every direction."

"I always have looked for an accident from that grindstone," said Mrs. Willard. "I wish the boys could be content

to grind their tools in a more cautious fashion. Was nobody else hurt?"

"I noticed John's hand was bleeding, but he's not hurt much or we should hear from him. What's to be done, Doctor?"

"I must examine this wound; perhaps have to perform an operation on the skull, but hope not. I see you've done very well keeping his head cool and elevated, and the blood in circulation. It may not be a bad case, ladies. Don't be frightened."

The advice, not coming soon enough to prevent such a state of feeling, was of little use to the ladies concerned. Though they tried to look on and make themselves useful, they both soon turned away, sickened and fainting, from the terrible sight of the fractured and blood-stained skull.

"My poor Constance, you must be fainting with hunger as well as fright," said Mrs. Willard, at sight of the untasted repast so long ago prepared. "We can not do any thing for your friend's comfort just now; but we must do something for your own, or I shall have two patients instead of one. Come, I'll warm up some of this food, which is hardly fit to eat as it is, and do you try to refresh yourself with it."

"Nothing but a cup of coffee, aunt, if you please; I couldn't take any thing more at present."

But Mrs. Willard, who was more used to scenes of suffering than her niece, put a brave face on, and by contriving to keep herself between Constance and the scene at the bedside, and by coaxing and petting, succeeded in getting Constance to swallow a few mouthfuls of food.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO PATIENTS.

An occasional groan during the doctor's examination gave encouragement to the hearers that consciousness was returning. Soon the trying scene was over, and the opinion of the medical man given, that with careful attention to administering the medicine, the patient would rapidly recover not only his consciousness but his good health. Particular directions were given concerning the treatment of symptoms, and Dr. Parker departed.

"I wonder what has become of Minnie," said Mrs. Willard, anxiously; "I haven't seen her since Constance came. Can she have gone down to Frank's to let him know of the arrival?"

"She was out at the mill when the accident happened," replied Nat Arnold, who had just come to the door with a letter. "She had just gone into the mill room before Mr. Harris came in to look at the machinery, and she hasn't come out yet."

"Why, where can she be now, Nat?—he must have heard of the accident!"

A sudden alarm spread among all present, lest Minnie, too, had been a victim to the bursting of the griststone. Mr. Willard caught up his hat and ran out hurriedly, but Nat was younger and more active, and reached the mill-room first.

There, lying on Nat's own couch, her eyes glassy with delirium, and her cheeks red with fever, lay the poor little fawn. It was true, though no one guessed it, that the fever had been ready for development at the slightest cause for several days. The agitation of the ardently-desired arrival had quickened the excitable pulse to such a degree that it had been then she had escaped to the mill, where she had finally went and came with chillish freedom. When the accident occurred, she had heard the cry of alarm and confusion, and looking out, unobserved by the terrified man, had seen the apparently dead body of Fletcher Harris carried toward the house.

A fainting-fit followed, and after that, stupor, fever, and delirium.

"Minnie! Minnie! what ails you, poor little fawn?" questioned Nat, softly; but she took no notice of him.

"What does this mean, Nat?" asked Mr. Willard, confounded by this accumulation of misfortune.

"She's out of her head," answered Nat, sorrowfully; "but I'm sure I don't know how she came so."

The father, failing to get any reply to repeated tender questions about her illness, which he from moment to moment addressed to her, finally sent Nat back to the house for her mother. Mrs. Willard came in haste, and was as much confounded as her husband. Besides, she had the question to settle of what should be done with two sick people and a guest, in the cabin. She knew enough of fevers not to be seriously alarmed by the symptoms of this patient. But she knew, too, that the critical condition of the other one demanded care and quiet, which it was impossible to give him under such disadvantages.

A council was called, to which Constance, and even Nat, were admitted; it was decided that, as Constance totally refused to be sent down to Frank's, as was first proposed, all the hands should go down there to sleep and to eat, for the present, and that the mill-room should be converted to the use of the family. By this arrangement Constance could assist in the nursing, which she would be permitted to do, because, as she said, she had brought the disaster upon Fletcher Harris. Minnie was to remain where she was, because she was used to the roar of the mill-dam, which Mr. Harris was not. Mrs. Gleason, who was skilled in nursing, was sent for to attend on Minnie, chiefly, and to be useful generally in her capacity of nurse.

Frank and Olive tendered their services, but were told they could be most useful taking care of the well men. Frank, however, came up with his mother-in-law to pay his respects to Constance, and to look in upon Minnie.

He found his cousin at the mill, where she had proposed to sit while her aunt prepared the family supper. He had not taken any pains to make himself tidy, for Frank was a rabid democrat; but his fine, manly figure, and dark, handsome

style of face, quite won the admiration of his cousin. After introducing his mother-in-law, he said:

"They are in haste to make you useful, cousin Constance; but you should not be imposed upon. Mrs. Gleason, here, will take all this off your hands, I'm sure. You must have rest after your journey."

Before Constance could reply to this whispered sentence, Minnie, who had caught Frank's voice, cried out:

"Frank, cousin Constance *is* coming!"

"Yes, so you told me last night, little gosse," answered Frank, softly.

"My sister," he explained to Constance, "had an impression that you were coming, and only last evening as told me of the fact."

"Perhaps she had heard of it," answered Constance, forgetting what her uncle had told her about not receiving their letters.

"No, I believe not; at least, not from a very authentic source; but my mother-in-law had a dream—"

"Now Frank!" expostulated Mrs. Gleason.

"I begin to think," said Frank, "that either you or Mrs. Gleason are very remarkable persons, since one had a prophetic dream, and the other inspired it."

"Tell me all about the dream," urged Constance, interested.

The tale was repeated, in spite of the deprecating gestures and remarks of Mrs. Gleason. Constance, rather awe-struck, replied:

"I certainly wrote such a letter, and I remember, now, that it has not come."

"Yes it has," said Mrs. Willard, putting her head in at the door; "your uncle has just read it. Nat brought it this afternoon. Your reputation for a prophet is better established than ever, Mrs. Gleason; but how is your patient? Minnie dear, how are you?"

"The lights up the creek," said Minnie; "see how pretty they are!"

"She's thinkin' about the fishin' last night. I guess that's what brought on this fever, stayin' out so long in the night-air. But I'll have the fever pretty near broke by to-morrow

this time," said Mrs. Gleason, preparing sundry herb-teas, baths and draughts, with the expertness of custom.

"Her head is very hot," Mrs. Willard remarked, anxiously.

"Yes; but it'll be cooler in an hour or two. She's allus so flighty when she's first took sick. How's the young man, now?"

"I think his countenance looks better, and no doubt he will be rational before morning. I don't think you need fear trusting him to our care to-night, Constance. I want you to get rest, if you can in such a comfortless place as we can offer you. If the noise of the water will not disturb you, this is the best place for you to sleep; because, once asleep, the motions of Mrs. Gleason will not be noticed above the roar of the dam."

"Do what you think best with me, auntie. And truth to tell, I do begin to feel very tired. But I should like to know if any change takes place in Mr. Harris' condition before morning."

"Very well. And now do you, and Mrs. Gleason, and Frank, go and get some supper, while I watch Minnie a while."

Frank declined, on the plea of promising Olive to be at home for supper; and Mrs. Gleason wouldn't leave her patient on any account just at that time; but would have some coffee sent over to her after she had got all the draughts, baths, and teas into operation.

Constance had not much relish for the supper. How weary, sad and troubled she began to feel, with the silent night shutting round the little cabin, with that deathly-pale face lying there on the pillow stained with blood, and no familiar friend to turn to in her dejection. A world of oppressive thoughts crowded upon her brain, and made her more weary every moment, so that when her aunt proposed again to leave her bed for her she made no further objections.

Her brain whirled with exhaustion as she laid her head upon the pillow in a little curtained nook of the mill room, and heard the monotonous, heavy fall of the water over the dam, ever beginning, and never stopping as it seemed to her; until presently she could not tell whether it was the beating in

her temples which kept the water going, or whether it was the pour, pour, pour of the water to which her pulse was keeping time. Before she had the dizzy question settled, she was asleep.

There was no sawing at the mill next day. Minnie was still very feverish, and occasionally delirious. Fletcher Harris had recovered consciousness, but was still in a critical situation.

As it had now become rather necessary for Constance to remain at her uncle's, it was also necessary to send word to Charles Lord of what had happened to his friend, and for Constance's luggage to be brought down.

Accordingly Nat Arnold was dispatched to Kamsville with the hired horses, accompanied by one of the men with a wagon, to bring back the trunks, and a commission from Mrs. Willard for housekeeping articles.

"Misfortunes never come singly," neither do other important events, for one brings on another. Mr. Willard was in great perplexity about his affairs. The men he had come who were to put up the new house, but there was no possibility of lodging them, or of having the work go on under present circumstances. Yet never was there so much need of a convenient dwelling; and the need seemed increasing, for Charles Lord would undoubtedly come down immediately on hearing of his friend's accident.

Constance, who sat beside the bed attending to the comfort of Harris, observed that her uncle filleted in and out, sitting a moment musing absently, then hurrying out again to confer with the carpenters who were hanging sullenly about, disappointed of their job.

"My arrival has put your affairs all out of joint, hasn't it, uncle?" she asked, with rather a troubled smile.

"No, it has only mixed them up a little. There! I'm glad you spoke. It has cracked the shell of an egg, I do believe, just hearing your voice."

Out of the house he went again, and remained some time, apparently giving directions to the carpenters.

"That was a good idea you had! I eat of it at Willard's Mill, half an hour afterward, as he met Constance going to the mill. "The plan of my house wasn't quite the thing to

exit us all. I've hit on something that will do much better, I believe, and help us out of our immediate difficulties—and it's this: I'll take the timber intended for foundations and the frame-work—they're plenty strong enough—and have them put right up over on the other side of the creek, out of the way. Then I'll have them covered with rough lumber, suitable for a barn, and have a rough floor and a couple of windows put in, and a cooking-stove; and so move right in and live there, while the carpenters put up a good, substantial family-mansion. It can be done in two or three days. What do you think of that, Constance? Do you think you could live in a barn?"

"I ought to be able to live anywhere; my aunt and cousin do," said Constance, secretly wondering at the new ideas of life which were crowding upon her.

"But it isn't quite equal to New York, eh?"

"Oh, I think that, under the circumstances, the plan is excellent—much better than waiting for the new house. Yes, I'm sure I like it very much."

"You and Minnie shall have a crib to yourselves in the barn. But don't write to any of your New York friends about it."

"Indeed, I shall not," returned Constance, very earnestly.

They had entered the mill-room while speaking, and Minnie, who was dozing, caught the sound of her cousin's voice.

"She is so beautiful!" murmured Minnie. "Father, I can't go to school. Cousin Constance—" and here the murmur died away to inarticulateness.

"She's been a frettin' like, all night and mornin', about school; and she's mighty struck with her cousin's looks, too. 'Pears she's kind o' scared her own looks an' boys mayn't please her cousin," said Mrs. Gleason.

"Poor Minnie!" sighed Mr. Willard; "she has never taken kindly to the circumstances of her humble fortune. To look up to this, we have indulged her in all her whims and fancies, and let her grow up wild as a fawn, until that's what the neighbors call her. She gets more and more whimsical as she gets older. I am really troubled about her future."

"She is very lovely in her looks," said Constance, caressingly touching the delicate brow with her soft fingers.

"Thank you, cousin Constance," spoke Minnie, earnestly, unclosing her eyes.

The recognition was so sudden, that a glow of surprise, almost of embarrassment, tinged the creamy paleness of Constance's cheek; yet she smiled an answer to the eloquent eyes fixed on her face, and continued to stroke the long, brown, rippling tresses that fell over the pillow, very tenderly.

"Father, I am not 'wild' any more," said Minnie, after a few moments' thought. "I am going to be a woman, now, for I am seventeen!—but I want some help from you. I want to go to school—can't I, father?"

She held up her little sun-burnt hand entreatingly, while the tears rushed to her eyes.

Mrs. Gleason made him a sign not to refuse her.

"We'll see about it, daughter, when you get well; that is, if Constance will consent to your deserting her."

"Is Constance going to stay with us? Oh, I am so glad!! because she will know better than any one else what I need."

"Yes, I guess she'll stay; for I've promised her a barn to live in!" and, to amuse his daughter, Mr. Willard told her about his altered plans.

Her eyes beamed with delight. "You must let Constance plan the new house," she said, "for I'm sure she can do it better than we can."

"Or, what will be a great deal more certain of pleasing you, we will get Mr. Harris to draw a plan, when he is well enough; he is an artist and designer," replied Constance.

Neither father nor cousin understood the flush of surprise which lit up the soft eyes on hearing this; nor the instant look of annoyance which followed.

"How is Mr. Harris?" she asked.

"Doing very well, I believe."

As Minnie fell into a reverie, her visitors, fearing to fatigue her, took leave; and Mrs. Gleason, noticing the flushed cheeks of her patient, redoubled her precautions against an attack of fever. But her care was almost superfluous; for Minnie's

symptoms improved with every hour, so that by night she was sitting up in an arm-chair.

"Waal, I declare! if you don't git sick, and git well agin, jist the easiest!" exclaimed the good woman, when she had given her patient a bit of toast and tea for her supper.

"Do you think so, Mrs. Gleason? But I have no time to waste in sickness just now. I can hardly wait till morning to be doing something."

"Bless my heart, child! Why, what do you expect to do, to-morrow?"

"Oh, several things."

"Now, Minnie, I shan't think you're keeping your word about bein' a woman, if you take on in such a childish way, and go and git sick agin. If there's any thing specially ne'erd in', that you know of, I'll do it fur you, ruther'n have you be so foolish."

"Will you? Then, just to please you, I'll try to be sick as long as I can stand it," said Minnie, smiling. "But, seriously, there's something that worries me. You know my pictures on the chimney?—well, I want them whitewashed out. There's some lime in the shed, and a brush. Will you do it for me, early in the morning?"

"Why, yes, if you say so; but some of 'em are right purty, to my notion."

"And then, I want you to take Constance to see the workmen, and let her tell them how to partition off the barn to the best advantage."

"La, Minnie! your cousin don't know the first thing about house-buildin', I'll warrant. Mebbe she's never seen one built. City folks seldom trouble themselves about such things."

"But she has always lived where people have good houses, and can't help knowing what is wanted for her own comfort."

"Waal, child, I have my doubts; but I'll do as you say, though, mebbe, your father won't like it."

"He always likes things done right," answered Minnie, a little proudly. "And there is one thing more. I should like to have Olive come up, to-morrow, and help me make

that pink calico. She has so much more judgment than I have in cutting out—no doubt she could make it look a little like Constance's dresses, if she had one to look at. You will let me sew a little, won't you?"

"Sakes alive! Minnie, I reckon you ~~haven't~~ got to be a woman—powerful sudden, too. Who ever heard of your undertakin' sich business, afore?"

"There never was any thing for me to do in the world, before, but just to 'grow up wild,' as father says; and now, you see, I must hurry, to make up for lost time."

Dr. Parker, on his visit that day, pronounced his patient's symptoms all favorable. To relieve Mrs. Willard of so many and varied cares, Constance devoted herself to the duty of attending on him; and though inexperienced, proved herself "pure womanly" in her capacity for such gentle service.

Nat Arnold's expedition to Kanesville was only partially successful. He brought Constance's luggage; but instead of her brother, whom she was pining to see, the following note:

"DEAR SIS:—I am sorry enough for poor Fletcher, ~~and~~ you too, for that matter! I am afraid I did wrong to bring you with me. If you are no better off where you are than most people in this country, I don't believe you can endure it all summer. But keep up your courage; I shall be down to see you in a few days. I ~~can't~~ come now, for there are some men here waiting for me to go with them to look at a piece of land up the country. Take care of Fletcher, and give my respects to the family.

"Your loving brother,

"CHARLES.

"P. S.—I'll try and get the pony for you, when I return."

During the days which followed, there was enough to fill the thoughts and hands of all. The mind of Minnie resembled from the new building, growing up with Willard rapidly; work at the mill was restored; Constance was the nurse of the unfortunate patient, and even little Minnie found something to do, in helping her mother with the nursing task.

When he first sat up in the easy-chair, improved daily in

empty hand—sweat half off, cushioned and covered, and not too infatuate—Preacher Harris had changed considerably from the really fine stranger who appeared to Minnie to like one of the heroes of her dreams, upon that eventful day on which she had first met him. With every half-stolen look at his countenance, now thin and pale, she thought him more interesting than when so well and bright, with the gay, mocking smile upon his lips. He was just pallid enough, and just enough sad and in spirits, to awaken pity as well as admiration, and pity is said to be akin to love.

But the one most changed of all the dwellers in and about Willard's Mill, was Nat Arnold.

"He'll kill him if working," said his employer; "I never saw such a fellow—works night and day. When he can do nothing on the new house, and the mill isn't running, he sits all day his gun and is off to the woods."

"Seems to me he has somethin' on his mind," answered Mrs. Willard.

He was utterly reckless of his own health or comfort—labouring with the nervous intensity of a person bound to wear himself out as soon as possible.

"I'm getting most an' an' of you, Nat," said Minnie, one day, gazing in at the mill like a ray of the April sunshine. "You look so cross!"

The frown which he gave her was anything but an angry one; if she had not been too inexperienced to read it, she would have felt all its stern despair.

"It's I who am getting cross of you," he answered, in a low voice, "you w'f the fiends are making you so fine!"

"Do you think so?" she said, laughing, and looking down at her dark curly frond. "If I should try all my life, I could never be like my cousin Constance."

"I wish you never could," was the bitter reply.

"Why, Nat, I think she is almost perfect."

"And that's the only girl you think is also a perfect."

She looked at him a moment inquisitively, wondering what could have led to his fit, and why he spoke so sudden and sharp—Nat was usually so cheerful and genorous. He turned away, abashedly, as if he could not bear the scrutiny of her childlike eyes.

The grating of the saw which he was "tending," prevented her hearing his muttered words.

"I wish that grind-stone had made sure work while it was about it!" and then, the next moment, he fairly cursed himself for the murderous thought, so foreign to his nature.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAWN TRANSFORMED.

The family had been two or three weeks settled in the barn. Constance had not proved herself much of an architect —the result of her efforts in that branch of art being the bare suggestion of two partitions: one across the building at one end, the other dividing the long apartment thus formed into two smaller ones. One of these lower rooms was occupied by the master and mistress of the house; while Fletcher Harris, who was now convalescent, had possession of the other. The "hay-loft" was resigned to the two young ladies; and being accessible by an easy flight of stairs, besides commanding a good view of the prairie and distant bluffs, was quite a favorite retreat of its fair occupants.

Mrs. Willard, partially relieved of the hard labor of years by having found some "girl" to do the cooking for the house, at the old cabin, had time to join Constance and Minnie in the invention of little domestic comforts and adornments, which went far toward giving a home look to their rough dwelling.

Minnie, in her pink calico, very successfully made in imitation of her cousin's graceful "wrappers," red with ripples of "making up for lost time." Ever modest, and almost too shy, she was never awkward nor slow of speech. A sort of self-possession, which was not the result of training, but of an innocent heart and trusting temper, gave dignity to all her actions. Even the world-beaten Fletcher Harris, who had nothing to do, day after day, but to watch her untutored ways, found himself dangerously fond of his only occupation.

"I wish," said Constance, one afternoon, when every thing was fairly settled, "that we had some books, some music, some drawing, or, in short, any sort of recreation."

Minnie, whose face always brightened up at the mention of such things, made no reply except an involuntary, eager movement of her head, which was not unobserved by their guest.

"Really, a book *would* be a good thing these long days—especially to me," returned Harris.

"I've got a few books up-stairs, which are at your service; though of course you've read them all before," was Minnie's half reluctant offer.

"Perhaps I haven't. I'm not a very universal reader. Tell me what they are, Miss Minnie."

"Oh," said she, "I am very sure you have. They are very old books—father brought them with him when he came to this country; and I fear they are no longer new to anybody who reads."

"I can guess what they are—tell me if I am right:—The Children of the Abbey, the Scottish Chiefs, Scott's Poems, Lamb's Riddle, Pope's Essay on Man, the History of Rome, and the old Columbia Reader. How near am I to your list, Minnie?"

"You're right, as far as you've gone," she replied, smiling and blushing; "but there are a few others. The one I like as well as any, is an old Annual, full of pictures."

"You are fond of engravings, then? I've got some beautiful ones I should like to show you if they were here."

Minnie did not say that she would like to see them—only said I a little, and half turned away her head, as if to avoid showing her own desires so strongly.

"By the way," said Fletcher, roughly, "you are something of an artist yourself, aren't you? I recollect seeing some charcoal sketches, when I first came here, on the chimney-piece. Could they have been yours?"

This was too much for the shy Minnie's fortitude. Casting a quick, blushing, timid glance at her guest, she darted up the stairs to have a good cry, unseen.

"I daresay, Fletcher, you are too bad!" exulted Constance. "You should know Minnie is very sensitive on the subject of her lack of accomplishments."

"Pray, go after her, and apologize for me. I would not have wounded her little heart for half my expectations," said Fletcher, with much earnestness.

"How can I apologize? She will not take my apologies, I assure you."

"Too much high blood for that, eh? But you can ask her to come down, that I may do what would be considered proper myself."

"No indeed. I never meddle in anybody's quarrels—you must find your own opportunity."

"If I didn't know from late experience that you are the best girl in the world, I'd be inclined to call you the worst."

"A very trifling difference!" laughed Constance.

Minnie did not make her appearance until Mrs. Willard, having commenced preparations for supper, called her to set the table. Then she came down, slowly and with evident reluctance. Fletcher noticed how pale her cheeks were, and how sad her downcast eyes; and waited impatiently for a chance of speaking with her apart.

At supper she ate nothing, but sat silently depressed, too anxious to hide her wounded feelings, and unable to overcome them.

The evening proved very beautiful. Constance and Minnie stood together in the door-way, watching the beautiful appearance of Venus, eclipsed by the lower horn of the new moon, seeming just to hang upon its tip.

"Oh, Fletcher, you must come and see it!" cried Constance.

He came very quickly—soon enough to intercept Minnie, who was moving away.

"Don't run away from me again, Miss Willard; though no doubt I deserve it. But I beg you will not think I intended any dis-respect to you, in my remarks this afternoon. Nothing was further from my thoughts, I assure you!"

"It was right you should laugh at my wretched attempts," answered Minnie, calmly; "they were only fit to be laughed at."

"No, I don't agree with you in saying that," said Fletcher; "because I hold that no efforts after advancement, in this or any other art, should be ridiculous. Besides, I remember

thinking these sketches, though rude in execution, as of course they must be with such materials, showed decided aptitude for original drawing."

"You are very good to say so."

"And very much in earnest, too, though I fear you do not believe me. If you will accept a few lessons from such an unworthy artist as myself, I shall take it as a compliment, and hope you have forgiven me."

"Oh, I have nothing to forgive!" cried Minnie, her cheeks again glowing. "I was only vexed and ashamed that you had seen my scratches."

"You need not be vexed and ashamed any more. But shall we begin our practice to-night?"

"You forget I haven't the materials. Oh! how I wish I had them!"

"I have them, which is the same thing. A part of my business down this way was to take some sketches of the country for an illustrated magazine. So now we'll set to work."

"And I'm to be left to amuse myself, I suppose," said Constance. "Minnie, I believe I'll trouble you for that old 'Annual' you spoke of, for I am rather fond of pictures too."

Minnie took the book with a murmured apology; but was so eager for the lesson, that she quite forgot, what Constance soon discovered, that it was the repository of other things than published engravings. A curiosity, which we don't pretend to defend from censure, led Constance to read the following verses, written in a cramped, old-fashioned hand—for Minnie had learned penmanship of her mother:

There's beauty in this summer wood,
And music in this brook;
There's grace in every floating cloud
That hangs above the lake;
Where I, a little Western girl,
My own wild fancies braid and curl.

Behind our hut a forest stands
In summer's richest green,
And in winter's wild expanding shade
Are we like as tall as I were;
I marvel much if such things grew
In the first home my children I knew.

I wonder if the whippowil
 Sings in those Eastern trees,
 With such a plaintive tenderness -
 As oft she does in these ;
 Or if the whistle of the deer
 In those fair groves they ever hear.

Or if, when wild, autumnal winds
 Have swept the forests bare,
 They've seen the prairie fire-king ride
 His steeds of terror there ;
 While the dusk red-men went and came
 With winter store of fatted game.

The door-stone of my father's cot
 Holds all my world in view—
 The prairies grand, the woods, the hills,
 Crowned with a dome of blue !
 And I so small, I scarce can see,
 For grass that waves 'twixt them and me.

Ah, well ! my little world is fair,
 Its stars and flowers, its clouds and moss ;
 The very mushrooms at my feet
 Are lined with pink, and soft as floss—
 I hardly think such marvels grew
 In that far home my childhood knew !

PRAIRIE FAWN.

Minnie was so engrossed with perspective, and light and dark shades, background and foreground, that she did not notice the paper pushed cautiously across the table to Fletcher Harris, and only made the discovery when it was being pushed back again. Perhaps she would not then have guessed what it was, but for the look of intelligence that passed between her two friends.

"Cousin Constance ! how *could* you do so!" said Minnie, with such a look and tone of absolute dismay, that her mother broke off in the story she was telling Mr. Willard, to inquire into the cause.

"The fact is, Minnie," replied Constance, "I *couldn't help* doing so. Mother Eve being strong enough in me to bid me to eat the apple, I could not refrain from offering Adam a share."

Minnie, who was too gentle to express any further displeasure, sat looking downcast and troubled.

"Though I don't like to take sides against you, Miss Minnie," said Fletcher Harris, "I am very glad Constance procured me the favor of reading your verses. The picture they

present is charming; and I should like to put it on paper as a picture, if you will lend it me for that purpose."

"Can you be serious, Mr. Harris?"

"Listen, and I will prove it to you. *Scene*—the wide-extending prairie in autumn; fires in the distance, and Indians with their ponies loaded with game. That is the background. Then, in the foreground, on the edge of the forest, is a cot, without other surroundings than you have given it, and a young girl in the attitude of listening, gazing out over the wild and breathless scene; while a deer, with head erect, half-concealed by the tall grass near the hut, is understood to have given the 'whistle' which has caught the girl's ear. Isn't that a pretty picture?"

"I've no doubt I should think so, if you were to put it on paper as you say," answered Minnie, blushing with pleasure.

"Then if I make the sketch, you are to give me the verses?"

"Oh, if they can be of any service to you, I shall be only too well pleased."

"And you will consider a copy of my drawing a fair exchange for this?" asked Fletcher, pocketing the paper.

"I don't think it would be an *even* exchange," returned Minnie, sincerely, "for the obligation would be all on my side."

And so the drawing lessons went on every evening. Minnie's fingers seemed inspired, so rapid was the progress they made in learning to handle the pencil. Fletcher, who was so nearly well as to begin to talk of going away, daily accompanied the cousins on short excursions, in which Minnie was happy, and in safety by her friends, and taught to analyze the simple flora of the prairie.

On over twice Fletcher went up along the creek shooting, in company with Frank. Brant, geese, swan, ducks, and several kinds of smaller game were in great abundance; often the entire wet prairie was white with geese, and nothing could have been prettier than the immense flocks of brant, flashing the silver lining of their wings in the morning sun. In addition to the good table fare provided by the sportsmen, Fletcher, who had an eye for nick-nacks, brought home great quantities of swan's-down, "for trimming the ladies' evening

dresses," as he said, and feathers in great variety, which he instructed them how to make into fans.

But the achievement on which he prided himself, was the manufacture of a plume of real grace and beauty, from the downy, grayish-brown feathers which the wild turkey casts from its wings and breast. This plume he fastened in a tasteful manner on the brim of Minnie's straw hat, and was rewarded for his success by the evident shy pride with which she regarded her new ornament. With all these new and pleasant occupations, the fawn was fast becoming transformed to a happy, busy woman.

"What is the reason," asked Mrs. Willard, one evening, as Minnie bent absorbed over her drawing, "that I hear no more about going to school?"

"I think I *am* going to school every day," answered Minnie, "and I am satisfied with my master!"

As she raised her beaming eyes, full of gratitide, pure and artless, to her mother's face, they exchanged a look so expressive and inquiring, that they fell before it in confusion; and she knew by a new-born instinct that she had said something which might be misunderstood.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. GLEASON FEELS "ONEASY."

ONE of the diversions of the cousins was to ride down to Frank's on the ox-wagon, when the men went to the woods for logs, and, mounting the log on the return, ride home again. In these frequent visits of an hour, Constant had become quite at home with Frank's wife and in the kitchen. With her the latter was a favorite friend—*as she was, indeed, with the whole population of the "bottom,"* for she was the universal counselor, nurse, and care-taker—an office which, though not remunerative in a pecuniary sense, lays up for the holder a godly share of those riches which "man can not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal."

But perhaps nothing more augmented her influence than the reputation she had acquired of being a "prophet." Whenever Mrs. Gleason had dreams, or felt "on-easy," something was sure to come of it.

One morning, Constance, having taken the before-mentioned ride, found Frank and Olive absent, and their mother rather depressed in spirits—a fact which induced her to accept an invitation to stay until the last log for that day went to the mill.

"You see, I've been kind of on-easy this mornin'. I didn't sleep all night; an' I had sick a roarin' in my ears, an' I heerd people a hollerin' and screakin'! I hate to have sick a night; an' I don't remember if I *ever* had one since the mill was washed away the last time."

"Perhaps," said Constance, "you have taken a severe cold in your head."

"Oh, it never affects me in sick ways. I ain't like you city folks, with the nurelogy an' the like. You see, I never wear a bonnet only just for 'pearances, when I go somewhere. I just run out o' doors, in wind, and sun, and rain; so I'm tougher I to 't. But it spiles the hair mighty. That shiny black hair o' yours would soon git red at the ends, an' dry an' rough, if you was to run out the way I do. But I don't care any fit about it—specially since Gleason died—not but that I like it. Minnie, now; what purty hair she's got. But I reckon it's natural in your family, an' her mother allus made her wear a hat. Minnie isn't the same kind o' stuff as most girls, nowadays. She's dreadfully taken with you, it 'pears."

"And I am taken with *her*. But I thought I heard you remark that the mill was once washed away. Was that since uncle lived there?"

"Yes; both since and afore. I reckon your uncle never spoke about it to you. He is powerful close-mouthed about his troubles, an' it's likely th' 's in the blood, too. You see, when he first moved here from Nauvoo, he was just as poor as—well, there wasn't nothin' in the country—as all the neighbors that had just begun to live there then—"

"How poor?" said Constance. "Did my uncle ever live in Nauvoo?"

"Oh, yes; to be sure. But mebbe, now, I haven't any

call to mention it, 'cause I guess your mother, likely, was dreadful set agin it."

"I never heard of it before."

"Well, Mr. Willard's jist as good a man as ever there was any—not even 'ceptin' Gleason—an' he was the best man I ever did see; but them Mormons, they got hold of him in York State, an' they pretended to prophesy; an' they made him believe he heerd spirits a speakin' to him, an' I don't know what all they did do. But, any way, your uncle he come out to Nauvoo with 'em, an' was there when the soldiers drove the people all out of the city. That was awful times, I've heerd 'em tell. Your uncle, he gathered up what he could put in a wagon—'twan't much—~~any~~ the church had left him—an' made haste to git across the river into Iowa—this was a Injun Territory them times—an' had nuthin' to do but jist to foller the leaders across to the Missouri."

Constance listened with breathless attention to this revelation of what had always been a mystery to her—of the reason why her uncle had lived this wretched, fugitive life for so many years.

"Did he still cling to the fortunes of the church?" she asked.

"No, I reckon not. He seen some of the doin's of the elders, that summer; they crossed the country, an' when he got to the Missouri, he parted from 'em, an' moved down here, yit furder down the creek. Not that he dared to say he parted from 'em; but that was a good many that stopped in this country to make farms to keep from starvin'. But Mr. Willard's suffered most—more'n any of 'em. They lost two children on the road, an' she was confined, an' lost that, too—no wonder, poor thing!—so't when they got here in the fall, they was jist able to put themselves up a cabin, an' on their well days—for they all had the fever—they would an' make benches, an' tables, an' such like things as they couldn't do without."

"How old was Minnie, then?"

"Oh, five or six years old, or such a mite. I reckon she remembers living in a wagon, for it made her drathful sick. I've tell her mother that's the reason she's never grown no bigger, for you're a likely race. 'Twaft so hard on her,

neither, 'cause she's got time to outgrow it; but her father an' mother—what with losin' their children all but these two, an' havin' sich hard work to git along, it was powerful disheartenin'."

"How *do* they get along, in a country where there was n' thing to buy, and nothing to buy with?" asked Constance, curiously.

"That's what I'm comin' to. For the first winter or two your uncle used to go down to Missouri with a few skins an' furs the Irijuns sold him, to trade 'em for flour an' meat. In the summer he tried to raise some grain of his own, an' did make out pretty fair; but he never took to farmin'—'twan't his sort of business. It was about them times people from Illinois began to move out here; 'cause they'd heerd of the settlin' up of the country, an' wanted to get land cheap. Guess he was sort agin Illinois on account of losin' all our boys there. First I know, he'd sold out to a stranger all our little house an' store, and was fixin' to come to Iowa, with the first payment in his hands. Waal, I don't jist remember *how* he first got acquainted with Mr. Willard; but they took a fac'ful likin' to one another. Your uncle had set his mind to have a mill up on the creek, at a place he'd picked out. The first year we come here he got it high onto done ready to saw; but the dam wan't built strong enough; an' there come an awful rise in the creek, an' washed it all away complete. Your uncle had spent all his means, besides being in debt some. Your aunt was clean out of heart, an' sick into the bargain. Then, says Gleason to me, says he, 'That's a ~~bad~~ ^{bad} like of Willard's, an' er't to come out right. He's bent on tryin' it again, an' I've made up my mind to go with him. I've got a few hundreds, an' they're jist his!' So they set to work together. Mrs. Willard, she moved up here, an' we all lived in the same house that year. Waal, they got the mill up again, pretty near the same place. I reckon they sawed wood enough to pay for the mill before the year was up. It was the summer of the great rise in the Missouri. The river set back in the creeks and slous, till they overflowed the little bottom, clear back to the bluffs, all but some high bluffs like, that wasn't quite under water."

"What does the river really overflow all this land?"

Is there danger every spring?" cried Constance, quite appalled.

"No, not allus. There ain't no danger anyways, ~~as~~ I know of, only to mill-dams. But this sile can't stand the water—it jist melts right away. Waal, as I was sayin', when the rise come, it took the mill another time, spite of all the men could do—an' they had lots of 'em. The women worked too—even Minnie—throwin' in brush an' logs to hold the dam. 'Twan't a bit of use, the water works so quick—an' it went all to nothin' agin in one forenoon. Then your aunt and Minnie, they went into the cabin—they'd got the cat in built up there then—an' cried. But your uncle, he walked, an' walked, up an' down the creek-bank, nigh the place where the mill was, an' he never said a word. Then Gleason, he went up to him, kind of smilin', an' he says to him, says he, 'Willard, it's *my* turn to try agin now.' So Gleason went to Illinois about gettin' some more money to start the mill agin. But things was growin' worse an' worse. The man he'd sold out to had got the buildin's there insured; then burnt 'em up to git the money, an' run away. I never see anyl' dyin' so soon as I abt any thin' afore, as Gleason was abt it losin' that property. He never had been a hearty man; an' now he jist pined away of layin' awake nights, thinkin' of his so poor, an' he a gittin' old. I seen trouble in them days, but 'twan't the worst yit. There was a man up to the Grove loaned your uncle some money to go to work at the mill the thir1 time; an' Gleason kept his word, and gin all his time, an' all his means, to help your uncle. In the course of the year they got it goin' agin, better'n ever. They was s^o s^o it would stand this time. But we're never sure of any thin' 'cept dyin' when our time comes. The very next spring it went agin!"

Mrs. Gleason paused to wipe her eyes, while Constance found her own were very misty.

"Gleason never got over it. It jist broke his heart like, an' he didn't live more'n two months. Nothin' could stop your uncle, though. He borred some more money at the place or 'nother, an' went at it more fiercer'n ever."

"Seems to me," said Constance, "he carried his persever-
ance too far in one direction."

"So some folks told him. But he didn't think so—neither did every other person; for one day he was helpin' the men at the new dam, an' along came the man that loaned him the first money, an' says your uncle, says he to the man, 'This don't look like your ever gittin' back your money!' An' the man says, "Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Willard—I ain't afeard fur my money when I see a man a workin' the way you are!" Well, it seems your uncle was right at last. The mill's been standin' these three years now; an' he's been payin' off his debts, an' buyin' land, an' gettin' ahead a leetle. I reckon if he has good luck another year he'll be above-board."

"Was your daughter married before Mr. Gleason died?"

"No, she wasn't—she was most too young. But Gleason couldn't die easy till she ~~was~~ married; 'cause he knowed, I reckon, that I'd a grieved myself to death ef I was left with only her. So he jist sent for Frank afore he died, and saw him married beside his bed. Frank's been a good son; but if Gleason didn't come back to me sometimes, I should go to him. I reckon you're kind o' tired."

"Oh no, I have been deeply interested—for all this story of my uncle's misfortunes was new to me. But you said you had such presentiments last night as you had before the mill was washed away the last time. I hope you do not fear another such calamity?"

"I don't pretend to say it'll happen. Only jist I don't like it when I feel this on-a-ness. La me! I'm afeard I've scorched this chicken 't I was smotherin' for your dinner. How does Nat git along since he boards to the old cabin?"

"I seldom see any of the hands from the mill," answered Constantine, a little haughtily. "They do not often come to the house."

"No, I reckon not. Nat's been kin' o' brought up amongst us, so it le' 'em like one of the family. I hev tho't sometimes he was settin' his mind on Minnie; but mble 'twas my conceit."

"I sh'dn't think that Minnie thinks of *him*," returned Constantine, suppressing an involuntary feeling of resentment.

"Tain't do very well, nōhow. Minnie's too delicate fur a poor man's wife, an' she's so set on gittin' an education. Tain't natural for some girls to be kep' to work;

an' 'tain't material far 'em to like people that is kep' to work."

"I'm sure," said Constance, "Minnie is extremely amiable."

"That's jist it. Ef she ~~isn't~~ so materially pleasant, she'd be mighty high-notioned. It's all right, though, an' no accident. Men's accidents is God's designs; an' Minnie'll find her place in the world. Yit I can't help feelin' a b'c' grieved for Nat—he's a good sort o' boy—same about as Frank; an' high onto as proud."

As Constance jumped off her log-carriage that evening in front of the house, her uncle and cousin came out to meet her.

"Well, boys," said Mr. Willard, to the team-hands, "how does the old Missouri look to-day?"

"Looks mighty growly," answered John.

"She's on a bender this time, sure," said Charley. "Whole trees comin' down with the grass around their roots, besides a raft o' driftwood."

Constance, who was prepared to be frightened, looked at her uncle anxiously, but his manner was quiet enough to reassure her.

"The first thing you do in the morning," he said to the men, as they drove across the bridge to the mill, "you get a good load of brush up from the woods. I'm afraid those muskrats have made a small hole in the dam—an' it won't take long for the water to make it bigger."

"I've been over on the island to-day, settin' out my pink-roots," Minnie remarked. "If the creek keeps rising as it has to-day, I'm afraid they will get washed up again."

"It is not likely, Minnie, that the water will rise much more. The season's too early yet for the melting of the snow up in the mountains. There may have been some rains to raise the river for a day or two. I can't see, though, what makes the creek so high, without any rain in this neighborhood."

"There's no sign of rain in the wind that is blowin' to blow, right out of the north-west," Mrs. Willard replied.

"Well, for ~~my~~ part," remarked Fletcher Harris, as the family sat down to the supper-table, "if the Missouri should get on a 'bender' as Charley says, I hope I may see it. I'd like to behold the 'mad river' justifying its name, for once."

When I camped up it, I had ample leisure for sketching its snags and sand-bars, I assure you. It was just one endless mud-puddle!"

"You wouldn't care about the sight *more* than once," said Mrs. Willard, sighing.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RISE.

The next morning was bright, cool and windy. When the girls arose, they looked out over a landscape unchanged in any of its usual features, except that, off toward the Missouri, where the bottom lowered, by frequent terraces of a few feet, down to the level of the river-bed, there was the silver shining of still water. This was nothing unusual—Minnie explained—since many of the sloughs had outlets which led to the river, and when the latter was high, the water set back into these sloughs and overflowed the low lands. Beyond this was lighter ground, constituting the timber-land of the Missouri; and nearly opposite the mill was "the landing," a little town on the river-bank, where steamboats called for wood and provisions. These people were now cut off from communication with the high prairie; but this, too, was of common occurrence.

After breakfast every man about the place was set to work with vigor. A load of brush was already dumped on the creek bank, and also a pile of sods from a piece of prairie close by, that had just been "broke." These were being thrown together, to stop some leakages, and to strengthen the dam—Mr. Willard, Nat and the carpenters working with a will. Plasterer Harris was gone with John and Charley to procure brush; as well as to see the river having, as Charley declared, a "high old time." Soon after, Frank made his appearance. The horse he rode, an intelligent-looking animal, said, "I refuse to cross the bridge with him."

"What's this, Charley?—don't be a fool about a creek full of water," said Frank, half coaxingly, to the frightened

creature. "Come, go over there now, like a sensible horse as you are!"

But Comanche would not be either coaxed or threatened into compliance; and Frank got off, to see if the horse would follow him over, which he did, at last, very reluctantly.

Frank was about returning, when the cry, "Look out there! —the bridge is going!" stayed his feet on the very threshold.

Here was a calamity to begin with. So insidious had been the working of the water under the surface of the ground, that the timbers on which the bridge rested, themselves rested on a mere crust at either end. Timbers and planks went down once, then rose with a whirl, and floated off toward the dam, already in too much danger.

"Hurrah, there, boys, with the pikes!" was now the cry; and every man seized something with which to stave off the blow of the heavy timbers against the flood-gate above the dam.

"Into the water there, some of you, and get hold of 'em!"

It was a perilous undertaking, as the planks, floating slowly, rose and fell with the hurry of the flood. The men hesitated. Mr. Willard, seeing their doubts, hastily threw off coat and boots and plunged in among the maelstrom before them. Frank, who had seen at a glance the work to be done, and had fled to the mill for the iron-chains, put one over his shoulders, and rushed to the assistance of his father.

"Keep the planks off us!" shouted Mr. Willard; and the two worked desperately together, getting the chain fastened around one of the timbers, in order to draw it out of the water.

This done without accident, they gave the chain to one of the men to haul it up the creek a little ways, and on to the bank, to be made fast there, while they endeavored to sweep the other in like manner. But the work was a terribly arduous struggle, which was fast exhausting the strength of the older Willard, as it was trying that of the younger. At this moment:

"Will no one help my father?" cried Minnie, in a voice of unnatural energy. "See! he can do nothing more!" And in truth he was sinking. "Nat! give me your pike, and save my father!"

In an instant Nat was in the water, had seized the timber, and was supporting Mr. Willard upon it, until he could recover power to swim the few feet to the shore; and Minnie—she was standing erect, pole in hand, on the beam of the bridge-gate, which the men sat astride, and pikeing off the planks from Nat and her brother. The second timber was chained round, and safely brought to shore by Constance and Mrs. Willard—Constance feeling constrained to follow Minnie's example in aiding the desperate efforts of the men.

As the teamsters now made their appearance, fresh help was obtained—the oxen put in requisition to haul the timbers upon dry land, and the danger to the dam averted, at least from one source. Nat received, while in the water, a severe blow upon his left arm, above the elbow, which was likely to prove a temporary inconvenience by partially disabling him. Mr. Willard was so chilled and exhausted as to have to be put in bed, and Frank was not much better off.

It was an excited and weary party that took dinner that day at Mr. Willard's table. The boats being all on the other side, and the bridge gone, the men were invited to eat with the family until some means of crossing were established. There was no time to attend to such matters now; for it was discovered that there were signs of the earth washing out around the end of the dam toward the house, by the same process which had undermined the bridge.

Accordingly, all hands set to work again as soon as dinner was over, collecting sods, Fletcher Harris included. Then began the work of filling in, at which Minnie and Constance assisted by hauling the brush. In a few hours the job was completed, and every thing done which could be done to render the mill-property secure.

When the family had time to look, they beheld themselves surrounded, almost, at a distance of a mile, on three sides, by a wall which had crept so silently around them as not to have been before observed. True, of course, it was a *sheet of sea*—the water from the river having found its way up nearly to the bluffs, through numerous sloughs which overflowed upon all the prairie not sufficiently elevated to escape inundation; but to the eye, and to the excited imagination of Constance, it seemed full of the terrible power and mystery of all seas.

The spot where the house stood, and all along this bank of the creek, was a ridge, which was supposed never to have been overflowed. No apprehensions of even a wetting troubled the minds of the residents at the mill-place. Therefore, when no more could be done, a boat was placed on each side of the creek for ferrying over; and the hands retired to refresh themselves with a game of *checkers* in the mill-room.

Minnie and Constance had been a long time up-stairs watching the slow and silent approach of the dimpling waters—dimpling into little wavelets in the strong wind.

"This reminds me," said Minnie, "of 'Oh, Mary, go and call the cattle home!'"

"Why, have you read that exquisite poem?" asked Constance, delighted.

"Such was my good fortune," returned Minnie. "A stranger who once stayed over night with us, left a copy of *Alton Locke* here, very providentially."

"Yes, murmured Constance, thoughtfully, "this is like the 'creeping tide' that 'came up along the sand—as far as the eye could see.' But what a suggestion! Do you know, Minnie, that I am *afraid*? I wish uncle would have the flat-boat moored here—at the very door."

Minnie laughed. "How can we get it to the 'very door,' unless the water comes first?"

"Well," said Constance, joining in the laugh, "it might be brought to this side of the creek, and made fast to the house by a long rope. I mean to go and ask uncle if it may not be done."

Used to similar scenes as Minnie was, she could not help being somewhat influenced by the evident alarm of her cousin, and joined, at last, in arguing that it would not do any harm to comply with her request.

"I am not quite convinced of that," replied Mr. Willard. "We are on the highest bank of the creek. On the other side are all the workmen, and the cook, besides the cattle, and Frank's horse. The cattle can swim, if the water rises high enough to throw down their pen. But the horse is locked up in the stable, and the men will be asleep in the mill. Do you think it would be fair to keep more than one boat on our side?"

"Cowards are seldom 'fair' when a crisis is at hand," Constance owned. "Yet I am anxious for the safety of *all*. Can not you, uncle, think of some plan to avoid accident, in case the flood should come here?"

Everybody was against such a supposition, because no such thing had happened, in the memory of the "oldest inhabitant," as the river overflowing this point of land. The creek was already full, and overflowing in places where the bank was low; yet the dam seemed likely to stand, and as for the mill—that could never fall, unless the Missouri changed its channel to this spot.

After all, Mr. Willard was too soft-hearted to witness the uneasiness of his niece.

"If there was anybody here to go," said he, "I would send word to the boys to be looking out for what might happen; but I'm rather sore and stiff for handling a boat."

"I am quite at your service, sir," Fletcher responded. He had been a silent, but not indifferent witness of the question "before the house." The look he had that day taken of the Missouri "on a high," had inspired him with a wholesome awe of such occasions; and he could not forget that he had seen among floating trees, and all imaginable rubbish, the dead bodies of cattle, and even of one man.

"Well, then, if you're minded to go over," said Mr. Willard, "just tell the boys to keep a sharp look-out round the mill to-night, and see if the water gets in much round the foundations. And tell Nat to let down the bars—I guess the cattle won't go off, they're pretty tired. I wish Frank's horse was at home—that stable is a mere board-box."

By such remarks, Mr. Willard betrayed that the possibility of disaster was present to his secret thoughts, though he liked not to admit it.

"We haven't any milk to-night, Minnie," said Mrs. Willard. "You'd better go over to the cabin with Mr. Harris, and see if Hannah has saved some for us; and tell her if she is afraid to stay alone, she can some back with you."

Charged with these commissions, Fletcher and Minnie were stepping into the boat, when her father called them back again.

"Oh, Harris! I guess the best way to do after all, is to

have the boys ferry over the horse on the flat-boat; and tell 'em to bring along plenty of rope to tie up the boats—we can't afford to lose 'em, and the moorings aren't very safe in high water."

"Are you a good boatman, Mr. Harris?" asked Minnie, as they were pushing off. "The current is pretty strong, now the boards are off the flood-gate, to let the water over the dam."

"To confess the truth, I am not; but you shall give orders, and I will obey them."

"Well, then, we had better paddle up the creek before we try to cross; for I don't think I would like to risk going over the dam."

"I didn't think you cared about the risk this morning, Miss Minnie. I shall always be ashamed, after this, that my city breeding makes me so helpless."

"Oh, I don't see why you should call yourself by such an unmanly word, Mr. Harris. You have been of much service to-day, and we all thank you very much indeed," cried Minnie, warmly.

"If only Minnie thanked me, I should be more than rewarded for doing what was only a common service," said Fletcher, as they shot into the current, and the hard rowing suspended conversation.

They landed a little above the cabin, where the old grass was broken down, concealing the state of the ground, which Fletcher found almost knee-deep in water, up to the trial.

"I see I'll have to carry you to the cabin, Miss Willard. You can't take a step here."

"Oh, yes! I can. The water will not melt me, and is not deep enough to drown. Poor Hannah! she would soon have been overtaken."

Bravely Minnie stepped out as the boat was hauled up, but instead of reaching *terra firma*, as she had expected, was received in the waiting arms of Fletcher, and conveyed quickly toward the cabin. Did she fancy it or not, that he had pressed her once tightly to his breast, before placing her on her feet in the cabin-door?

Fletcher left her there to go to the mill. It was already deep twilight. The men had taken their suppers, and living

nothing further to do were gathered in the mill-room, smoking or card-playing. As Fletcher entered, the scene struck his critical eye as being worthy of Hogarth.

The mill-room, with its wide, uncurtained windows, now gray with the gloom of a cloudy evening;—the slouching figures of the tired carpenters, who smoked in silence, leaning their elbows on their knees;—the mill-hands playing a "cup-throat" game of *cartes*, three-handed—two of them heavy, still-looking fellows, with a decided air of "fader-land" parentage in their fair, flat faces, and sturdy build;—Native American—light, tall, active and handsome. A lighted lantern, on the rough bench around which the players were grouped, struggled to assert itself against the lingering daylight, and with indifferent success.

"Why didn't you play a spade, John?" asked Charley, seeing they were going to be beaten by the more expert Nat.

"How I know what you got in *your* hand?" retorted John; "Iink I shmell 'em?"

This witty wit, and the relapse of John into the "fader-land" dialect, evoked a general laugh, in the midst of which the men left Fletcher in silent enjoyment of their *tableau*. His errand was soon explained. All hands turned out to execute the order, or to take observations of the condition of affairs about the place in reference to its safety.

A rope was stretched across the creek, the passage of the loaded and freight accomplished, the horse turned loose to go home, and the family settled for the evening.

"We have a little more to do, yet," said Fletcher to Minnie, as lights were brought. "I must finish that sketch I promised you, and you are to take one more lesson."

Castanea's reel "Alton Locke," and especially the lyric lines referred to. Mr. Willard toasted his feet at the fire—for the evening was chilly—and his wife thoughtfully darned some mittens for the hands of the woodmen. Thus the hours slipped by that the family usually spent together.

"My picture is done," said Fletcher, in a low tone to Minnie; "will you see it?"

She took it eagerly—so her its value was great;—a real *sketch* drawing, and all her own!

"I shall prize it so much!" she murmured; "it is beautiful!"

"I have called it 'The Fawn of the Prairie,' you see; thus, to *me*, it will have a meaning very precious—while to others the name will seem to refer to the pretty young deer in the foreground."

Minnie's eyes drooped again upon the picture, from which she found it impossible to raise them. She was not altogether pleased with herself, nor with Fletcher, for the frequent recurrence of little scenes in which there was certainly an air of interest beyond that of friendship. If this was fashionable breeding, to deal in this kind of insincerity, she was glad she knew no more of it. Was not Fletcher Harris the lover of Constance? else, why did he linger near her when he *might have* gone away? Perhaps he thought she was silly enough to fall in love with him, because he was superior to her ordinary associates; but she was *not* in love with him—no, she was not! and if he did not show more respect to her cousin's feelings, she should despise him—yes, she should!

These fleeting thoughts made her cheeks burn; and the knowledge that Fletcher was observing her added to her confusion. She hastily put up her drawing-materials, with some murmured thanks for the labor her master had bestowed on her lessons, and was about to withdraw, when there came a roar, and a boom! then a longer roar, and then silence.

"The dam! the dam!" cried Minnie, her father and mother.

Out rushed every one. The moon, just risen, and struggling with a dark bank of clouds, showed the creek flowing on—level above and below where the dam had been, though dragging up from the bottom scattering planks and timbers, which it hurried away on its rushing current.

The men on the other side were shouting as if shouts would restore the ruin.

"Curse such luck! The devil's in this creek! There goes a thousand dollars in labor, time and money!" ejaculated Mr. Willard. He therewith turned his back upon the scene of his loss, and resumed his seat by the fire, where he was silently toasting his feet again when the others followed.

Fletcher thought, considering the hard work of the morning, this was taking the matter very coolly. But as his host did not seem inclined to talk about the event, he avoided any unnecessary reference to it.

Mrs. Willard and Minnie could not so well conceal their feelings. The former resumed her mending, it is true; but sobbing sighs and frequent tears told of her grief at the catastrophe. Minnie retreated to a window and wept secretly, while she gazed at the clouded moon.

"Father will work himself to death!" she whispered to Constance, who followed to console her. "He never will give up this fatal mill-business."

It was growing late, yet no one seemed disposed to sleep. The exciting events of the day, and the doubt which yet enveloped the immediate future, banished all idea of repose. Minnie and Constance took an observation from their "loft," and could plainly see the advance which the water had made toward their home; in fact, they were already surrounded, except where a long narrow ridge ran parallel with the creek down in the direction of Frank's house. Along this ridge they could discover some one approaching, who, they immediately guessed, was Frank himself, come to see what had sent his horse home alone.

Minnie ran to meet him at the door, with the news.

"Bad enough, Minnie, but not so bad as it might be. I've got worse news than that. *The bucking is gone down the river!*"

"My God!" exclaimed his two male hearers; while the woman, held close together, could only ejaculate, "Oh, Frank!" "Why, Frank!" "Oh! oh!"

"Many people lost? How did you hear?"

"Can't tell how many are lost—it happened about dark. One man found his way through the woods and water to my house. He says there's a good many, he thinks, groping about on the prairie; and some will likely get drowned in the sloughs. I came up to take the men and boats out to see if we could save any."

"I doubt if the water is deep enough on the prairie to use the boats," said Mr. Willard.

"Oh, yes, it is, on the other side of the creek;—there's plenty of water to navigate in! And it's getting deeper all the time. This strong wind is blowing the water out of the river all over the bottom."

"It's time to be doing something then. You shout to the boys—if they can hear you over this cursed wind!"

Frank's hail was answered, after a few efforts, and the men made to understand that they were wanted with their boat, and lanterns. Though the moon gave a feeble light through the clouds, it was thought best to take along lights to signal the whereabouts of the boats, and to direct any stragglers where to find rescue.

Half an hour was spent in preparations; and then the little fleet was ready to go down by the woods, and cruise along in the hope of picking up any fugitives from death.

"Well, now, boys, you can't all go. One's enough to a skiff, and two to the flat-boat—that's only four," said Mr. Willard to the men.

Frank expressed his determination to be one of the four. Fletcher offered to go with the flat-boat, presuming he could *pole* as well as a better boatman; and Nat said he would take a skiff.

"But *you* can not manage a boat, Nat—you're disabled," interfered Minnie, who was an anxious witness of the enlistment.

"My arm is better since I put that liniment on it," replied Nat, without looking at Minnie.

"But he is not able to go—is he father?"

"Why how do *you* know, Minnie?" asked her father, rather petulantly.

"I think," said Minnie, with an unusual show of spirit, "that some of the men might offer who have two good arms."

Nat stole a glance at his advocate, but was only strengthened in his resolution. The men, made ashamed of their tardiness, now all declared themselves more or less anxious for the service; and the boats were soon making for the woods—the flat-boat to keep in shallower water.

"Wish us a safe return, won't you Mrs. Willard?" Fletcher had said, as they left the house.

"We all wish you that, I am sure," answered Minnie. "Nat, I wish *you* had stayed with us."

"The next time, Minnie!" was Nat's brief reply.

The anxious family were more than ever unable to think of sleep. Mr. Willard laid down on his bed, but kept open the door of the room, that he might converse at intervals with

lis fellow-watchers. They, sadly peering in each others' faces, sat talking softly, and often looking out to see if the lights of the boats were still visible.

Thus passed several weary hours, without further events. Silence, if not sleep, was beginning to reign in the little melancholy party, disturbed only by the sound of the wind, which had increased in violence, when, suddenly, Minnie raised her head from her cousin's lap, where it was drooping, with a start.

"What is it, Minnie?" whispered Constance.

"The water—don't you hear it?"

Distinctly now came the plash, plash, of waves against the house.

"Oh! what shall we do?" cried Constance, pale with alarm. "Oh, Minnie! auntie! we shall all be drowned!"

"I hope not, Constance; but this is a terrible night, certainly."

Hannah, the cook, who had been dozing in a chair tilted back in a corner, awakened by hearing the exclamation of Constance, and, seizing upon the promise of being drowned, now began to lament loudly:

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! to be sure we shall all be drowned—and not a boat to save ourselves in. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!"

Constance, who had some bitter thoughts of her own on account of the truant boats, ventured to express her thoughts to her uncle.

"Girls, be still!" he answered, sternly, addressing no one in particular; "we have done our duty to our neighbors, and must leave the issue with some higher Power. But there is no danger to us at present, nor do I think there will come any; if there should, we have more chance to save ourselves than the poor wretches at the landing."

Mrs. Willard, too, though she looked pale and care-worn, lacked any expression of discontent at their position, and tried to animate the others with courage.

The cattle had crossed the creek, and were huddling together in the shelter of the house, to escape the wind. The gray morning soon broke, showing one wide waste for miles, of stormy-looking water. The advance of daylight only

increased the strangeness of the scene, by showing all its most appalling features. The only dry land visible between the bluffs and the river was the top of the ridge leading down the creek. As the house stood on the lower, that is, most depressed end of this ridge, it was surrounded by this time on all sides. The new foundations and the lumber were floating widely about the bottom.

About an hour after daylight the flat-boat returned, bringing a freight of several persons, whom Constance recognized as her acquaintances of the log-cabin by the slough—all but the boy, Ike—he was missing, though it was hoped he had been picked up by the others, or in some way escaped to a settlement up under the bluffs. These poor, homeless children, and their parents, were received joyfully by the family, and made warm and comfortable. The presence of sendily needing their protection, more troubled and tried than themselves, seemed to inspire new life and hopefulness. Even the cowardly Constance found comfort in administering assistance to these poor people, whose house had been washed all to pieces by the wind-driven waves, and was now floating in fragments over the prairie.

"You can no longer regret your *usefulness*, Mr. Harris," said Minnie, at the first opportunity.

"No, thank God! not quite so much as formerly. But are you pleased with me for it, Minnie?"

"Did you do it to please me?" asked the young girl, soberly.

"I'm afraid I did, Minnie. I think Nat did, too," he added, eyeing her closely.

"Then I regret it for both of you," she said, turning away with dignity.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EXPLANATION.

The wind continued unabated through the whole of that day; and, although the water did not rise much higher, it dashed against the house threateningly, or tossed in waves "as far as eye could see."

Frank and Nat had both been successful in rescuing a few frightened and exhausted creatures, who were distributed among such of the neighbors as were fortunate enough not to have suffered much from the rise. They remained out as long as there was hope of helping any, and were quite exhausted by the service. Nat, indeed, had so injured his arm by use, and cold, that he was pressed to go to bed in Mr. Willard's room, and be doctored; and the interest which Minnie exhibited in his welfare, if it soothed his pain, did not seem to furnish comfort to Fletcher Harris.

There was nothing to do, that dreary day, but to talk over the late events, and watch for some sign of better times. Toward evening the wind began to go down, to the joy of all; for then, it was known, the flood must retire, at least to the lowlands.

By night it was still, and growing warm; and the cause for apprehension being now past, the family retired early, to seek rest from their long watching and toil.

On the next morning, the dawn showed the creek within its banks. There was still much water in sight, but evidently retiring toward the river. And so for a week; each day improving the condition of the prairie, though travel was still suspended, on account of the loss of bridges, and the deep water in all the sloughs. The people began to repair their ruined homes, or to build in new places. Great anxiety was felt by some, concerning missing friends, whom they yet hoped to find alive.

One day, Constance and Minnie were watching from an upper window the movements of the men constructing a new bridge across the creek.

"What's that up there by the island? I can't make it out," said Minnie, still gazing curiously.

"Oh! is it weed, or mist, or floating hair—
Or drowned maiden's hair?"

repeated Constance, without dreaming how near its meaning might apply.

Minnie turned pale. "Why, Constance, I believe that's what it is—it's some one drowned!"

"Heaven forbid! but it *does* look like wet hair. What if it should be?"

"I'll go and tell father," said Minnie, hurrying down.

In a few moments some of the men had drawn out, and laid upon a plank, the body of the little tow-headed boy, Ike. Besides this one, no others were drowned in that neighborhood, except such as the river took when it undermined the landing.

The roads, at first, had mended sufficiently for travel, and Fletcher Harris felt that his business could not longer be neglected, nor Mr. Willard's hospitality any longer taxed. Yet, so strong a hold had the artless child of the prairie got upon his manly regards, that he could not leave without knowing something more of her sentiments toward him—nothing more of the cause of her late coldness, tempered though it was with a gentle melancholy. But the more he desired it, the further off seemed the opportunity of speaking with her alone. All their former walks had been given up since the flood, on account of the mud and water to be encountered; and he only saw her now in the presence of the whole family.

Fortune, however, which is said to favor the brave, one day favored Fletcher. Mr. Willard was obliged to go to the Grove for something needed by the carpenters, and, having invited his wife and niece to a seat in the ox-wagon, Minnie was left alone to keep house. Fletcher had gone out in the morning with a fowling-piece, but, knowing the plans of the day, took good care not to be gone too long a time.

"Miss Minnie," said he, throwing down a brace of ducks upon the door-step, "will you take another drawing-lesson to-day? or shall we walk? or in what way can we best spend the day?"

"I do not know," she replied, the wild, fawn look coming over her, as it did when she felt embarrassed, and keeping industriously at her sewing.

"For I am going away to-morrow," continued Fletcher, "and would like to mark the day a red one in my calendar."

Minnie glanced up at him, leaning against the easement of the door, and saw him, manly, animated—his fair, clustering locks dampened with exercise; his eyes shining with peculiar brightness; his whole face expressing refined sensibilities and truth; and, for an instant, she could not withdraw her eyes, for thinking how familiar that pleasant face had become, and for regret at losing the sight of it.

"We shall miss you very much," she said, "with a candid warmth.

"We?"

"Yes; of course I mean Constance, and—and all of us," she replied, growing confused by his brief interrogatory.

"Oh, I know Constance will miss me, Minnie; we have always been like brother and sister; but I *should* like to hear you say that you are sorry I am going away."

"I believe I am rather sorry to lose your society, Mr. Harris; and equally so to lose your instructions;" and Minnie smiled, half sadly.

"It's very strange," said Fletcher, gravely; "but a man craves much regard sometimes, perhaps when he don't deserve it. I, for instance, can not bear to go away from this place, where I have been so kindly treated, without feeling that some *last* is said on my account. Can't you say this much for me, Miss Willard?"

Minnie's cheeks glowed, while she hesitated for an answer. Pride, humility, and the fear of being wrong, struggled together in her heart; but woman's tact came to her aid.

"I have already told you that I felt some *sorrow* at your departure. Are not sorrow and sadness the same thing, Mr. Harris?"

"Aye!" said Fletcher, tempted to smile at the little art. "I did not suspect the Fawn of coquetry."

Minnie was growing so uncomfortable, that her discomfort made her seek relief in retaliation; and she replied:

"If I were guilty of *serious* coquetry, Mr. Harris, like that of being engaged to one lady, and making vain speeches to another, who has not the wit to answer, *you* might then reprove me."

"Do you think that I am engaged, then, Minnie, and is it *me* you mean to charge with trifling?"

His voice was low and upbraiding, and his face bore witness to the injury done his feelings by her suspicions. Poor Minnie! she was not proof against any thing like saltness in a self-possessed man of the world, such as Fletcher Harris; and she fell into the snare.

"Are you not going to marry my cousin Constance?" she asked, with a brightening countenance; "I thought you were."

"Then you thought wrongly, Minnie. May I come in there and tell you something?"

"I can not bid you stay out," she answered, shyly.

"Here I am, then"—taking a seat beside her own—"and I shall trouble you to listen to me, while I talk a little about myself. I am *not* what you seem to suspect, a ladies' man—one who talks fair to every pretty woman of his acquaintance; but have remained both honest and heart-whole, amid all the fascinations of society. Something—I used to think it was my love of Art—kept me free; but now, I think, it was my good star, and that it led me to *you*. I love you, little Fawn, because you are a 'rare and radiant maiden,' unlike those of your sex I am best acquainted with, and every way, altogether, after my own heart. I wonder if one so sweet and fair could love me?"

"Oh, Mr. Harris!" cried Minnie, without venturing to look up, "I know nothing about love; I can not tell—" and here she broke quite down.

"You can answer me one question, Minnie. Was it because you believed me engaged, that kept you from returning my love, which I am sure you must have seen?"

Her hands trembled so at her sewing, that the needle only pricked her fingers, and did little else besides.

"I wish you would tell me, Minnie," said Fletcher, trying to look under the downcast eyclids, and getting possession of the little, trembling hands.

"I'm sure I never asked myself, nor thought about it," she replied, raising her modest eyes, with a truthful glance.

"Is that true? Oh, Minnie! I had hoped you had."

There was no stratagem about this burst of disappointed feeling; and its reality touched the gentle heart of his listener.

"I have sometimes dreamed of loving some one *like* you, Mr. Harris—some time when I am older and wiser," said Minnie, blushing. "But when you and my cousin Constance came here, I thought you just suited for one another; and I know not why, except on this account, and your intimacy, I believed you were engaged. I could not think *I* was any thing in comparison with Constance, that I should be loved; and—"

"And you would not love unmasked? Ah, Minnie! genuine love can not wait to be asked. You have no word of encouragement for me, to lighten the heaviness of parting?"

"I do not think it would be hard to love you," Minnie murmured, smiling, with tears in her eyes.

"Thank you, Little Fawn! I'll trouble you with no more questions; but let my precious one remember that she is the day-star of my hopes, to-day and forever! I am going to be absent two or three months, Minnie, when I shall find it hard to stay away; but if I can have the promise of your love when I return, I shall have something to make the future bright."

Minnie was tempted to bestow the happiness it was in her power to confer, by three words, spoken on the spot; but the truthfulness of her nature prevented her speaking them, and her bashfulness made her wish to end the conversation. Therefore she gently withdrew her hands from his, and resumed her needlework. Fletcher, who was, as he said, no "lame" man, forebore to follow up the slight advantage he had gained by her last confession; and Minnie, in her gratitude, became more self-possessed, and, unconsciously, more beautiful than ever before.

"I don't see," she said, after a thoughtful silence on both sides, "how any one can help admiring Constance. You must have seen some very beautiful ladies, Mr. Harris. Is not *she* as beautiful as any?"

"Do you admire her so very much?"

"I never imagined any one handsomer, or more graceful."

Fletcher smiled perplexingly. "That's because your ideas of beauty have been formed on such models as those around you; your brother's wife, for instance—a fair, plump, red-cheeked, good-natured young person; or," he added, laughing, "her mother—spare, angular, yellow-haired, and pink-faced, with eyes of no particular color, though sharp enough, and very pleasant."

"Mr. Harris, is it fair to ridicule my friends?"

"I haven't ridiculed them. Come, confess, now—were not my criticisms just? I feel a certain admiration for Mrs. Frank Willard, and much respect for her mother, who seems to be an excellent woman. But, in an artistical point of view, neither could be called beautiful, certainly."

"If *they* appear in so ludicrous a light in your eyes, I suppose you laugh at my mother, too," said Minnie, in a grieved tone.

"You are wrong once more, foolish little Minnie. To say that your mother could now sit for a portrait to grace the gallery of Beauty, would be greatly flattering her, as I presume you know. But any one can see that in her youth she must have been unusually pretty. And a person used to studying faces, as I am, can see in hers a soul above the meanness of her surroundings, and the evidences of a tried and patient spirit. She is what is called a superior woman; and no disadvantages of place or dress can conceal her high qualities."

Somewhat appeased, and not a little curious, Minnie ventured a question:

"And father?"

"You incline to get my opinion of the family. Well, since I volunteered so much, I can not refuse. Character, generally, makes a man's looks, if he have no peculiar form or stature; and no one would mistake your father for any but a whole-souled, honorable man. But I should say, if he has a fault, it is that of too great devotion to a favorite idea, amounting, in fact, to obstinacy. Am I not right, little Minnie?"

"Yes, I think you are," Minnie answered, sighing uncon-

seriously. "And still you have left my first question unanswered—concerning Constance."

"Do you wish me to admire your cousin as much as you do, unsophisticated Fawn? That, I fear, would be dangerous, if you cared for my admiration yourself. But seriously, Minnie, Constance is a very fine-looking woman. She has a tall, well modeled figure, symmetrical features, a complexion of a rare kind of beauty, handsome hair, and a finely-moulded head;—and more than all, for women of her sort, a *stylish air*."

Anxious as Minnie was for an opinion to compare with her own, something in the catalogue of charms made her feel very little, plain and humble. Her changing countenance betrayed more of this feeling than she knew—encouraging Fletcher to offer a contrast.

"But I can describe a kind of beauty I like better than this. I know a lady who is not very tall, but so light and lithe of figure that she has all the elegance of a taller person. Her brow is low and smooth—her nose delicate—chin oval—and mouth all sweetness. She has a pale complexion, but can blush divinely, and her hair is the most beautiful in the world. It is long and half curling, and grows in the greatest luxuriance; but its color is its greatest perfection—being a golden-brown—like something the ladies wear for vails. And then this lady has such an air! When she walks she steps like a deer—so erect—so light and graceful. And her eyes have timid glances, very bright and very swift, yet are soft as a peacock's. And her character is just as lovely as her person. How shall you think I ought to feel toward such a lady as I have described?"

"I think you should not be able to keep from loving her," answered Minnie, more humbled and completely extinguished than before.

"That's just the case I am in!"

She glanced up, and caught his meaning and triumphant smile.

"Oh, you can not have meant me!—I am so—so very insignificant!"

Fletcher laughed most heartily at this view of herself—and the more so, that she was so extremely serious.

Minnie discovered with alarm that it was almost dinner time, and she had quite forgotten to make any preparations. As she now hastened about her duties, Fletcher intruded himself with a saucy freedom into all her affairs.

"Why don't you wear gloves, Minnie? I hate to see you spoiling such nice little hands as yours."

"You know the adage about the cat in gloves? If ever you had done housework, Mr. Harris, you would know that the hands have to be sacrificed."

"Well, I think yours look best holding a pencil."

"Minnie," he said, after trying to sew a little on the collar she had been making, "I've a mind to tell you something about Constance."

"Please, do."

"Of course it's in confidence. We are great friends, and friends are always telling each others' secrets—she'd have told mine if I'd had any; so to be like the rest, I must tell hers. She has been engaged—and disappointed."

Minnie looked deeply interested.

"Her lover was a merchant-prince's son, and bred to idleness. His father and her own were in business together, and failed together, through the speculations of the former. The children were very much attached to each other; and it was thought that by uniting their joint fortunes, though not large, they might live in elegance, if not in luxury. But Mr. Lord died when Constance was only about sixteen, and left his affairs in such a situation that it took several years to settle every thing up; when it was discovered that he had only a few thousands to be divided between the heirs. When this became known, Mr. Lord's old partner withdrew his consent to the projected marriage; and the disappointment killed Constance's mother."

"But had the gentleman nothing to say for himself?"

"Oh yes, he rebelled for a time; and he and Constance had a few heart-breaking meetings;—and then he gave her up. For what could a man, bred to idleness, do with a wife equally helpless, and no fortune between them? The effect of this turn of affairs was, after a time, beneficial to Constance. It taught her to despise the follies of her class. She urged her brother to put in bank all their joint money, and to study a

profession. She then went into a fashionable school as a teacher of music, and there remained, until she came out here with Charles, to try the merits of speculation. Charles is a fine fellow and will probably get rich. Talk about the Infernals and they appear! Charlie, old fellow! how are you?"

The advent of her new cousin so fluttered Minnie that there were several mistakes in the dinner, that day; but they passed unobserved amid the general good feeling of the party—the family having returned just before. Constance was delighted, and everybody else pleased. The only present trouble for the cousins was the shadow of a speedy separation—Charles having just made this flying visit to apologize to his sister and relatives for his seeming neglect.

He was so *very* much enraged he could hardly find time to eat or sleep; so he said. But he had brought a peace-offering—two ponies for the girls, and some books.

Her cousin's coming more than ever confirmed Minnie's desire for a different sphere of life. How delightful it would be, she thought, if she were only as accomplished as her friends, to live always in the midst of such society. But should she ever be so blest? Poor Minnie! her heart sunk at the question. Only this one evening, how charming it was! Every body was animated, and talked of such interesting subjects;—how could she ever live her dull, uneventful life again, when all should be gone? She wondered very much—she could hardly believe, that Fletcher Harris loved and chose her, when he could have chosen from among those so much above her.

If Fletcher remarked the sadness in Minnie's eyes when the parting came, he may have hoped it was from the awakening of the tenderest of sentiments in her young heart. At the very least, she regretted losing him.

CHAPTER IX.

UNEXPECTED EVENTS.

THE summer passed more quickly than was anticipated. The ponies were a great means of pleasure, and did daily service. Mr. Willard, whose business prospered after his losses were repaired, purchased a handsome pair of horses, and a light wagon, with which the family made several visits to Kane-ville;—and once, Minnie and Constance had stayed a week at the hotel, to gratify Charles Lord, and been admired to *his* heart's content.

Minnie had enjoyed it too. It was her very first appearance in society! and the embarrassment of it at first rather detracted from the pleasure. In truth, with a less skillful manager than her cousin she might not have been so well received. But Constance had added, to the few purchases Minnie's purse enabled her to make, the superfluities of her own wardrobe; so that the city girl and the little wild girl of the prairie differed little in outside refinement; and it was astonishing, Charles declared to his sister, how such an unpolished child could make such an impression.

So Minnie was delighted with her experience; and especially with the serenades they received. Constance had laughed herself nearly ill on the first occasion of this kind;—so almost frantic was Minnie's enjoyment of the music. She would not let Constance stir—and was as anxious to get a peep at the performers and their instruments as if they had been Gorillas.

"Why you silly child," said Constance, "that's only very ordinary music to take on so about."

"Hush!" whispered Minnie. "*I never heard any before!*"

Every glimpse she got into a higher sphere of life, strengthened her purpose, if possible, to equal those she saw, in elegant attainments. Books were procured, which she studied diligently, making rapid progress in every new study. But best of all she loved her drawing. Having received from Fiedler, after his departure, an ample supply of the best materials, she

work'd faithfully to do something he would approve. Only one brief visit had Fletcher made, during the summer, to the mill; and then had not said aught to Minnie of his love for her; being determined to let her mind and heart develop itself, un hastened by a too urgent suit. He saw she was growing rapidly in intellectual graces—he hoped after a while she would wake up to the consciousness of her woman's wealth of heart.

Meantime, the new house, which Fletcher had planned for Mr. Willard, was making good progress toward completion; and it was thought it would be ready for a house-warming before the close of navigation. As Constance and her brother were to return to New York late in the autumn, it was designed by her uncle and aunt to make this occasion coincident with that of a farewell ball, to which were to be invited such acquaintances in Kanesville as had been polite to Minnie and her cousin. And this anticipated party, which was to be, under Constance's direction, a grander affair than Minnie had ever witnessed, caused her to begin some new lessons. Every evening, after the carpenters had finished their work, the shavings were swept away in one of the new rooms, and Minnie took a dancing lesson from her cousin. Sometimes, to illustrate the figures of a dance, the services of Nat were required; and often of Frank and Olive. These latter were accustomed to attend the country balls, and knew enough of the art of dancing to learn more; and in time became very good performers, to the great satisfaction of all concerned.

Mr. Willard, who, when he did any thing, never did it by halves, was un bounded in his preparations. Such wagon-loads of the delicious wild fruit of the country, as had to be made into sweetmeats and jellies! Such quantities of grapes as were gathered for wine! The country was ransacked to procure butter and honey, fowls, game, and every good thing; while Minnie's mother consulted long beforehand an old cook-book which had been preserved amid the family odds and ends for years.

One day the cousins, finding the October weather too witching for study or work, had the ponies saddled for an excursion.

"Which way now?" asked Mr. Willard.

"Oh, we are just going up to buy a few shares in the new city!" said Constance, laughing.

"If you do, I hope you'll learn the other shareholders some sense," replied her uncle. But, though he smiled, Minnie thought she detected a certain gravity in his manner, which betokened some new trouble.

"Why, father?" she asked, as she gathered up her pony's reins.

"There's some of them fellows been down here to-day, wanting to buy out my mill. I told them I was not done with it yet, myself. Then they let out the fact that they had resolved to get rid of it, some way; and so offered to buy it, at a price which would not cover its cost—without talking of any profit. Blast them, for a set of rascals!"

"But what do they want to do with it?" cried Minnie.

"Oh, they say it makes their town-site wet, by back-water from my dam. There never was a bigger falsehood—for the dam can't back the water more than two miles, to the upper bridge—and it's four to their cursed town. I guess they'll find water enough coming onto it from the bluffs, in a rainy season, before that water gets to my dam, as it does by natural drainage. But never mind—go along, girls, and buy out the city, if you can!"

"There's more trouble for father," said Minnie, anxiously, as they started off. "And it goes hard with him—as I always know, when he uses rough words."

"But they can not do any thing, I suppose, if he will not sell out?"

"I don't know;—I'm afraid they can give him both trouble and expense; and he is not able to bear either. Oh, when will this business ever cease to produce both, for him! If father had taken to farming, or to cattle-raising, we might have been well off;—I might have been sent to school somewhere in the East, and mother might have had some enjoyment of her life. She is fond of gardening, and of agricultural pursuits; and would take delight in having a fine farm;—while now we have nothing raised on our own land—no fences or garden—but my poor little island!—in fact, no improvements at all. Nor can we ever have, until this mill-property has been made to pay its own debts!"

But as the case appeared to Minnie, she could not long feel the freeness of care while the world looked so beautiful as it did that day, in the soft, golden light of October.

The new city that had sprung up under their eyes that summer—every day adding another house to its rows of white-painted dwellings, in which, as yet, nobody but the share-holders dwelt, in bachelor-fashion—had a fresh interest to the cousins, as they cantered about the grassy streets, since it seemed likely to be connected in some way with the fortunes of one of them.

After riding about, and counting the houses, forty or fifty in number, our equestrians conceived the arduous idea of climbing the bluffs above the town for a view of the country on the opposite side of the river. Tying their ponies to some wild plum-trees growing at the bottom of the ascent, they succeeded in reaching the highest point in the vicinity, and getting a panoramic view of miles of country on both sides of the Missouri.

So far, all was delightful and satisfactory. But suddenly there was a commotion observable in the main street of the town which laid like a drawing below them—of gentlemen rushing out of unfinished bachelor's halls, in pursuit of something resembling in the distance a runaway hobby-horse.

"Can that be one of our ponies, I wonder?" cried Constance, between laughter and alarm.

"If it is," said Minnie, "we shall have to 'ride and tie,' going home."

"And pray, how is that?"

"Why, you will ride on as far as you think proper; then get off and leave your horse tied for me when I come up, while you go on until I overtake you."

"Well," laughed Constance, "if the pony should escape tying like this one, you might have to walk the whole distance after all! But we had better go and see if we have to practice this mode of retreat."

The girls found, on descending, that it was even as they had surmised—Minnie's pony having slipped his halter, and taken to flight. Two or three gentlemen, who had probably been watching their movements, and who had endeavored to capture the runaway, advanced to console them; glad, perhaps, of

an excuse to begin an acquaintance with their fair visitors. But at the first glance Constance had of the gentlemen's faces, she caught violent hold of Minnie's arm, exclaiming in an undertone :

"Oh, Minnie ! what shall I do ?—how shall I conceal myself ?"

Minnie had only time to see that her cousin was very pale, and seemed very much alarmed, when one of the strangers, equally excited, cried out in an agitated voice :

"Good God ! Do I really see Constance Lord ?"

"Harry Stewart, is this you ?"

"Dear Constance, I am so happy to have met you !"

"Spare your compliments, sir."

"I beg you, Constance, not to use that tone !"

During this brief aside, Minnie was doing her best to answer the condolences of two other gentlemen, guessing that her cousin was desirous of escaping observation. But Constance now turned gracefully to them, joining in the talk, and laughing at the misfortune which had befallen her cousin. The gentlemen regretted not being able to offer something better than sympathy, but had come down in the stage, and had no conveyance of their own to offer.

"My horse is picketed out here in the prairie, if either of the ladies will ride him," said Stewart, with an appealing look at Constance.

But Constance made no answer ; and Minnie declined, on the plea of not daring to mount a strange animal.

Some arguments were used to induce her to venture, which she felt obliged to reject, for fear of displeasing Constance ; who, she saw, did not wish to incur the obligation. Her cousin insisted on walking home ; as she said they had often rambled as far, when they had not even one horse between them. Finding the ladies resolute, their new friends, after renewing their regrets, bowed and went their ways ; while the cousins walked leisurely homeward, Constance leading her pony.

They had not gone far, when a horse's feet were heard coming behind them.

"Miss Lord, I entreat you will take my animal—he knows you very well—you have ridden with him before ;" and Stewart dismounted and walked beside them.

"His master knows me as well," replied Constance, haughtily, "yet I have no inclination for a further acquaintance."

"Can not you forgive me, Constance? Can not you believe that I am no longer the fool I was? I swear by every thing in earth or heaven that I never have ceased to regret my folly—that I now scorn it as you do."

"Do you imagine I am *rich*?" asked Constance, with a sarcastic smile.

"I will answer you, calmly, Constance. I am in a fair way to be rich—and if I were not, should offer you what I had, without asking if you had any thing. Can not you believe me?"

"It is not easy to change well-founded opinions," replied Constance.

"Farewell, then, till your opinions *have* changed!" and swiftly mounting, Harry Stewart dashed off over the prairie, seeing not and caring not whither.

"Oh, Constance, you were cruel, I am sure!" cried Minnie.

"Please don't talk of it, Minnie;—you can not understand 'my feelings.'

They had crossed the creek at the upper bridge, and were following its windings on the other side, when Minnie's quick ear caught the crackling sound of flames.

"The prairie's on fire behind us!"

On every side was grass, grass, nothing but tall, dry grass, that burnt like tinder. The wind blew the flames right after them, and at a fearful rate; while escape seemed impossible. Even the creek was separated from them by a marsh deep enough to sink them in. They tried to mount the pony together; but it would not carry double, and they only lost time by the effort. It was still two miles to the mill, and they should have to run, to $\frac{1}{2}$, the whole distance, if they made good their escape.

Constance still led the pony, fearful to let it go; for it might yet be needed to save *one* life. And so they ran as fast as their feet could move, so far as they could run; and still they had not advanced more than an eighth of a mile, before they could feel the hot air from the fire.

Minnie knew there was nothing to stop its course before

coming almost to the broken land about the mill-place. In vain she wished for a match to set a *back-fire*. In vain they both ran bravely on, resolute not to waste time in lamentations. The pony snorted, and tried to escape. They *must* stop to breathe, or they should fall down and be devoured by the terrible foe upon their track.

On came the red, leaping flames, swift as the wind, irresistible as fate. The black smoke already began to stifle them.

"Oh, Heaven! *must* we perish?" cried Constance, as she gazed, fascinated, upon the terrible yet beautiful destroyer, whose hot breath scorched her cheeks.

"Oh, cousin Constance! please *do* ride!" urged Minnie, strangling already. "If you ride, I can run faster; but if you don't, we shall both be burnt up!"

"No, I will not!—I shall let the pony go! Run, run, Minnie!"

"*Constance!*" shouted a voice behind them.

"Thank God! there is help."

It came not a second too soon. Riding right out of the flames, Harry Stewart brought life in place of death. In an instant Minnie sprung to the pony, comprehending that now her cousin was safe; and Constance, seated behind their deliverer, clung tightly to him while they sped away, away, out of the *clutches of the fire-king*.

"But I don't see, Harry, how you dared come through the fire," said Constance, when they were all safely recovered from their fright.

"What is there I would *not* have dared, to save you," he murmured in her ear. "Why, when I first noticed the fire—which some one passing must have set with a cigar—my first thought was of you two ladies, and your danger. I was ~~at~~ ^{at} some distance away, but galloped hard on after you, till I came to the bridge; then, seeing how hot the fire was, and that there was only a narrow road through it, I stopped to wet my hand-kerchief, which I tied loosely over my mouth. Chancing to have another about me, I did the same for my horse's nose; and then we lost no time until we found you; though Sudbury didn't like the work very well!"

Minnie thought she had never seen her cousin so beautiful

as she was that evening; and somehow, seeing two people desperately in love with one another, set her to wondering how long it would be before Fletcher came again, and if he would ask her to love him, when he did.

CHAPTER X.

A WEDDING AND A PARTING.

"Whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

There had been some changes made in the programme for the house-warming. The first and most important one referred to a wedding ceremony, which was to inaugurate the ball. The second was the making the occasion a farewell for Minnie, as well as the bride.

Minnie was going to have granted the darling wish of her heart. She was going to a city—a *great* city—to have plenty of books, pictures and music for six whole months; and to see wonders upon wonders, such as she only knew the names of.

The preparations for the ball were all of the most successful sort. The house looked handsome, was well lighted, and sufficiently furnished. The tables were beautifully set with every variety of viands the country afforded, which was many, and laden with foreign fruits, wine and cake, and garnished with flowers. Mrs. Willard looked with pride on the result of the combined labors of herself, aided by Olive and Minnie and a celebrated cook from Kanesville. Mr. Willard surveyed the preparations complete, with a gratified eye, yet searching for some omission which he could supply. The whole family were well dressed, according to their ages, and did no discredit to their fashionable friends; even Mrs. Gleason, with her fair hair concealed under a tasteful cap, and in a neat black dress and collar, could not have been thought a "Hoosier."

Nat had an entire new suit for the ball, and exceedingly well he looked in it—as well, if he had been standing for his

picture, as Charles Lord. Poor Nat! he knew his deficiencies, and took care not to display them. He looked well, and danced well, and was useful in waiting upon the guests; and thus he fulfilled his part.

Minnie was nearly as wild with admiration for the bride as the groom himself. And truly she justified some extravagance of praise, by a beauty which asserted itself just as proudly in spotless muslin robes, as it would have done in satin and diamonds.

Minnie, similarly attired, officiated as bride-maid; offering a lovely contrast to her cousin:—and so Charles Lord whispered her, as he led her to her place beside the bride.

The solemn “Whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder,” was followed by a buzz of admiration; and then by a soft clamor of congratulations, in which Mr. and Mrs. Harry Stewart were wished all imaginary blessings.

Then followed the band—the same which had serenaded Minnie, the recollection of which made Constance smile—playing a march to the wedding-supper. From the destruction which thereupon followed to many good and beautiful things, it would appear that people who go to wedding-balls, have good appetites. The bride and the bride-maid were toasted over and over again; and then the dancing began.

As Minnie and Charles Lord had been practicing together for a day or two, she did not shrink from her bride-maid duties as much as she feared she should. No other dances than cotillions, and a simple polka were attempted—in which she acquitted herself with grace and ease; and her delight at the music, though she concealed it, was as intoxicating as ever.

A refreshment-table being all the time kept spread, the dancing and the demolition of good things were kept up until the small hours of morning; when the revelers dispersed with three cheers for the bride, and three thanks for their entertainers—and the family and guests were permitted to retire for a brief repose.

The sort of Harry Stewart, after the five o'clock, as might be supposed, was not very difficult of presentation. When Constance forgave him, she did so fully, and with no moral reservations; and he, not wishing to run any more risks,

met to urge their marriage. This was the more easily arranged, as Charles Lord wished to remain in the West for six or eight weeks longer; and was glad to find an escort offering for Constance of so agreeable and proper a description.

This matter once settled, Constance immediately petitioned her uncle to allow Minnie to spend the winter with her in New York; to which he replied he was not able—but, after all, consented to her going, as much to Minnie's surprise as delight; for she could not at first realize the idea of such good fortune.

The bridal party were to take a boat at Kanesville, after allowing a few days of rest and preparation, succeeding the ball.

"Well, Constance," said Mr. Willard, "I am glad you let us give you a wedding; and though it was but a country-wedding, it was under a roof I wish you to regard always as your own."

"Thank you, uncle; wherever my husband's fortunes may lead me, I shall not soon forget that I owe you much kindness; nor that I have learned those things under your roof which have helped me to discipline my life."

"And your husband," continued Mr. Willard, "is as welcome as yourself to call my house his home. But I hope," he added, watching Stewart's face, "that he does not intend, like his partners up here, to destroy an old man's property, if you'll let me—can't get it for nothing."

"No sir," replied Stewart, promptly; "I should never have put you in such proceedings. It is true my interest in this new town is not great—but if it were, I should say the same. Constance has mentioned to me some points in the case, and I have examined into them, and believe you are right in your opinion of the nature of the overflow which sometimes damages a portion of the town-site. And I believe, too, that you have the law on your side, which provides for dam-principals. I certainly shall use my influence in your favor."

"The men of that town company," said Mr. Willard, exclaiming, "are a set of scoundrels. They are some of the sharpest of the frontiersmen, whose whole intelligence runs to money-getting; and an honest man stands no chance at all

with them. They are ungrateful, hard-hearted and designing. They don't care about the fact that I have worked eight years getting my mill so that it begins to pay me dividends, and furnished them lumber to build houses over their worthless heads. They've gone and set their town down on a little flat ground, between the place where the creek comes out of the bluffs, on one side, and a chain of bluffs on the other; and then, because it's overlowed in a heavy rain, they want to pull my dam out! I could show them how to drain the water into the creek—but no—they don't want the trouble to do drainage. They must sell their town lots—and so when men complain of their being wet, they tell 'em it's Willard's dam that does the mischief. They'll keep that story going, and get the people so excited about it the first time there comes a flood, and their cellars run full of water, that they'll come down here to tear out my dam. But they'll never do it while I'm living. Let them come and go at it, if they think best! The boys and I can put their heads under water with the pikes, fast as they set to work at that business. No, they'll never destroy my hard-earned property—*so help me God!*"

When Mr. Willard had finished this pointed little speech, he got up, walked back and forth once or twice across the room; then brought some wine; and lastly asked Catherina what he should do with her pony.

"Oh, keep him, to be sure! When I come back, some time, I shall want him to ride; and until then you can do what you please with him."

"And yours too, Minnie?—Do you want that runaway and stray kept for another adventure?"

"Indeed, yes," said Minnie; "I should keep him as a reminder of a certain '*making up*!'"

"Minnie is right!—and this I drink to her saying," returned Stewart.

The greatest grief Minnie had in leaving was that she could not say farewell to Fletcher; who, having run up to St. Pierre, sketching the upper Mississippi, did not even know of her intended departure. What would he think of such her gone?—and I would be come to New York this winter?

Not chose to take leave of Minnie without a word of

witnesses." A day or two before her going, he watched his opportunity, and surprised her bidding good-by to her little island.

"I am glad to see you in this place, Minnie," he said, huskily; "because it was just here I seen you, the last time I ever did see the little Fawn—that's the night afore your cousin came. I used to think I could get to be something worthy of you; but that's all past now, and you've growed clear out of my reach. I hope you'll like your new ways when you get to livin' in the city; and I hope you will always be as happy as you are good and beautiful. There's something I meant to buy you a present with"—handing her a twenty-dollar gold piece—"but I didn't see just the thing I wanted; so you must get it yourself in New York;—a little gold chain—real good fine gold—and a little heart to wear on it, around your neck."

"Oh Nat, I thank you; but I can not take your money—it's too much!"

"No it isn't too much, considerin' who and what it's for. I've got no other use for it; and would rather it should be hangin' around your neck, than to be anywhere else."

"But it would buy land, Nat; or something nice for your house-keepin'."

"I don't want no land—and I never shall have no house-keepin'. If you won't take it, Minnie, I'll throw it in the creek."

"I will take it, Nat—and get what you desire with it."

"Good-by, then, Minnie. We used to be more like brother and sister than like strangers—mayn't I kiss your cheeks, for good-by?"

Minnie could not help blushing; but she very frankly pressed her cheek to his lips, and received as pure a kiss of love as man ever gave woman, humble though was the giver. And that was Nat's farewell.

The partings were all over at last. Minnie had cried a good deal at leaving her parents so lonely—yet she could not turn back; so strange is the desire of youth to see the great world and try its paths for itself.

CHAPTER XI:
IN THE CITY.

THE first days of March were bright and warm in the city. Crowds of gayly-dressed ladies thronged Broadway, where Minnie and her cousin, Charles Lerd, had been enjoying a promenade. Yet, though Minnie still found enjoyment in the excess of beauty which everywhere met her eyes, something in the influence of the spring air, and the sight of spring violets which poor little barefoot children had to sell, made her homesick. She had been growing more and more silent during the walk home, until, when she was fairly inside the parlor door of the Stewarts' elegant residence, her lips quivered, and the hot tears would keep hurrying to her eyes.

"Why, what is the matter, little cousin?" asked Charles, surprised. "No, do not go—send a servant away with your things—and tell me what is the trouble;" and he forced her gently into an arm-chair.

"I really do not know, unless I am homesick."

"Tired of us so soon, are you, Minnie? What can we do, that we have not done, to make you happy?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing! I have been ~~very~~ happy all winter—~~too~~ happy—and now I suppose I am suffering the reverse," said Minnie, trying to smile, but bursting into tears instead.

Now everybody knows that a man can not see a pretty woman in tears without wanting to say something very tender to her. But there was another fact, which was not known to everybody—connected with this story—which was that Charles Lerd had for a long time been wishing to say something tender to this particular pretty woman, without ever finding a favorable opportunity.

"Dear Minnie, are you unhappy now?" asked Charles gently, stroking her soft hair as he stood beside her. "I would give my life, and think it a pleasure, darling, to save you if in all pain and trouble."

"Don't say that, cousin Charles!" cried Minnie, suddenly drying her tears.

"Yes, I ~~must~~ say it, dear; because you should know that it is true. When a man gives his heart to a woman, as I have mine to you, he does not count any thing he may have to give, even his life, of much worth, if it can serve her."

"Oh, I wish you would take that all back, Charles," she answered, earnestly, forgetting all about her homesickness in this new trouble—"for indeed, I can not bear to hear it!"

"And ~~why~~ can not you bear to hear that I love you?"

He knelt beside her chair, and grasped her ungloved hand, while he gazed with passionate inquiry into the sorrowful eyes.

"Because—because I do not want to lose your friendship—and I must not accept your love."

"You ~~must~~ not—are you engaged, Minnie?"

There was a pause, in which Minnie's changing countenance expressed a variety of emotions.

"Yes," she murmured, at last.

Charles Lord sprung to his feet, in time to discover Fletcher Harris retreating through the door-way.

"Hullo, Fletcher!" he exclaimed, brushing past him—"just go in—you'll find some of them in the parlor."

Thus interrupted in his retreat, Fletcher entered. Minnie was still there, blushing and confused, uncertain whether or not Fletcher had been a listener to the scene with her cousin.

"Let me congratulate you on your engagement, Miss Wilton!" said he, taking her hand in a formal manner.

"But I am not—"

Embarrassment tied her tongue.

"You are not engaged to your cousin, I know," he resumed. "Where is Mrs. Stewart this morning?"

"I will go and find her," faltered Minnie, gliding from the room, pale as death.

The first one or two months of Minnie's visit had been devoted to the element of sight-seeing, and particularly to walking and studying all the galleries of art. After the novelty of the city wore off a little, she began to settle down to the usual round of acquiring all the knowledge within her reach—literally crammed her brain with learning. Though her cousin's home was the resort of some gay and much good company, she grudged the time devoted to the former; while

she studied the latter as she did her books. In vain Constance argued with her against this unceasing mental labor; her unvarying reply was, "Let me improve my time now, even, for I may never have another opportunity like this ever. By and by I shall be forced to take rest."

Among her pursuits she now included oil-painting; and quite set Constance wild by the eagerness with which she followed it up—doing nothing but "*live in oil*," as her cousin said.

"It must be a powerful motive," said Charles Lord, on the return of himself and Fletcher Harris from the West, "that makes a young girl like her forget the usual ambition of her sex, to read herself blind, or daub herself over with oil-paints day after day."

"I am not aware of any motive she has, except to know every thing anybody ever did know," continued Constance; and while Charles marveled at it, he admired her the more.

But Minnie *had* a motive, even beyond the true one of "wanting to know every thing." With the sensitiveness of a losty pride, she had attributed the silence of Fletcher on his last visit, concerning the state of her affections, to a conviction on his part of her unsuitableness for the position he had once thought of offering her. If before she had eagerly sought to gain the accomplishments of a refined life from a love for them, she was now resolved to obtain them as a compensation to her alarmed pride.

And so, during the whole winter she had revolved and striven. And yet, though he was almost daily in her society, and gave her his assistance with knotty questions, or art-troubles, no word of love had Fletcher breathed. He often praised, and sometimes complimented her in terms of practical flattery; he treated her confidentially and almost tenderly—he gave her, in short, every reason to trust and love him—. I Minnie, at last, *had* loved and trusted him; and only waited for him to ask her, to tell him so. Poor Minnie! the mistake of that morning, though she could not rectify it, was breaking her heart.

"Why don't you wait and go with Charles and Minnie?" asked Mrs. Stewart, when Fletcher informed her suddenly that he was about starting for the West.

"Am sorry to miss their company; but really have to go this week."

And then Minnie learned there could be no explanation.

"I tell you so much study would impair your health, Minnie," said her cousin to the pale and nervous girl who was languidly picking to pieces a soiled drawing. "I shall be ashamed to send you home in such a condition."

"Oh yes!—'I told you so' is a terrible bugbear, Mrs. Harry Stewart," answered Minnie, trying to laugh. "I've lost a little sun-barn, in your closely shaded parlors, have I then? It ought to be an improvement."

"Well, I forbid you to meddle with my books while you remain. We can find something better to do in hunting up something to take out West for your future enjoyment;—and we'll begin to-day; so put on your hat for a walk."

CHAPTER XII.

THE GAMESTER'S THREAT FULFILLED.

RAIN, rain, rain—would it never stop, that down-pouring of water from the lead-colored heavens?

It had hardly ceased raining for a month—and the more it rained, the easier and faster it rained, as if it had only lately learned how. The creek was too high for sawing—the roads were too heavy for hauling logs—the prairie was like a soaked sponge—little lakes covered half the bottom—and yet it continued to pour down as if it were a second deluge.

Mr. Willard stood at a window of the new house, looking toward the city of one summer's growth—christened Missouri City—but commonly called Railroad Town, because its promoters had placed the termini of all the possible and impossible railroads on the map of their town-site. Something in his thoughts turned his eyes in that direction. Presently he saw, riding through the pouring rain, two men on horseback, picking their way along through mud and mire.

"D—n them!" he muttered—turning away from the

window abruptly, and settling himself before the fire, as if warming his feet.

Mrs. Willard, who was mending more patches for the workmen, looked up inquiringly; but seeing his mien, did not venture to aggravate it, by asking what was the matter.

Soon there was a loud knock at the hall-door, and Mr. Willard arose to admit his visitors. They were two young men, the oldest not over thirty, well-dressed, shrewd-looking, and with the off-hand manners of their class in the country.

After some remarks about the weather, they at once began the subject which he had come to discuss with Mr. Willard, by saying:

"Got a price set on your mill yet, Willard?"

"No, sir; I haven't. I don't think any price you are likely to offer will buy it."

"Well now, look here, Willard—we'll give you fifteen hundred dollars for your ~~mill~~ ~~dam~~, or the privilege of pulling it out;—five hundred dollars in cash, and the rest in will land anywhere here on the bottom lands. The land will be increasing in value; and with the five hundred you can commence farming."

The young man eyed his intended prey, as if he had a mind of grasping him.

"I'm too old a man," replied Mr. Willard, steadily, and with restrained ire, "to begin life over again. It is but a few years since I came to this country; and I had a poor start. I held to it before you were two years old. I built my mill before these lands were surveyed. I've had it up every year, just as year; and fought my way along against bad luck, and good. Three times my mill all went down, and every time I have to make some repairs, if not to build a new one."

"That seems to me a good reason for getting rid of the business," remarked the other speculator, but coolly.

Without heeding him, Mr. Willard went on.

"I've swelled when I was so dizzy with fever, that I could scarcely stand; or so sleepy from night-waking, to pay my debts, that I could not keep awake; and lay me down in the mill till one o'clock, to wake me when the sun had run through. I've been through all the difficulties that man ever met with—and I've come out the best of last, and I have

to stay ahea'd. I never wronged any man, though some have wronged me;—I've paid my debts when my family were suffering. I have got a house at last; but I haven't got fences or any other improvements; and it will take another year's work to get it all right around here, and pay what few hundreds I still owe. So, gentlemen, you see you can not buy me off—unless you furnish me the money for getting my place in order, and a few thousands to live on after that."

The two gentlemen addressed, fidgeted in their chairs, and stretched their necks to look out of the windows, as if something in the prospect might furnish them an argument.

"We consider that we've made you a fair offer, Mr. Willard," said the younger one.

"Five hundred dollars would just about pay my remaining debts. Then paid, I should have a lot of wild land, and nothing to work it with. I don't think your offer will do, sir!"

"What will you take?" asked the older one of the men.

"I'll say this," Mr. Willard answered, deliberately; "we may both consult lawyers, and if they think the law gives you any pull against me, I'll compromise for three thousand dollars cash;—but if you don't agree to that, I'll law it out with you;—I'll run my mill ten years all the time, to pay the lawyers!"

"We've got as much money to spend that way as you have, I reckon!" said the younger one, screwing up his features to a very determined look.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Willard," the older one now spoke, with an apologetic air; "that we can't adjust this matter in some other way. As we can't let it, your dam is a great injury to us—a nuisance, in fact—and if we can prove it so, you will be obliged to let it down. Our town is all under water at this moment! When it comes to dry off, there will be a great deal of sickness, no doubt."

"Why don't you drain it?"

"Draining wouldn't do any good."

"If you'll take my advice, I can show you how it *will* do good."

"I don't see how. But we must be going—and we shall go to law, I suppose?"

"That rests with you, gentlemen. Will you take a glass of wine?"

"No, thank you."

The next day Mr. Willard rode up to Kanesville, through the still pouring rain, to consult with the gentlemen of the law. Their advice was, to hold on to his rights, and not to be badgered into giving them up. They thought his case was a good one—perhaps he might get up a petition among his neighbors, who understood the matter, to have his dam privileges made perpetual, by act of legislature. If he could, and keep the affair along until next winter, one of them offered to present it.

This last idea struck Mr. Willard as a good one—for he was quite sure of getting all the old residents on his side.

At the hotel he met Fletcher Harris.

"I wish you would come down and see us, Harris," he said; "the shooting is fine, and will be, for some time. It's mighty lonely at our house now—by the way, you haven't been there since the new one was finished—and I've got some trouble on hand, too, I'm afraid. Come down, and we'll talk matters over—do some shooting, anyhow."

Fletcher promised to come when the roads were a little better.

Just when these threatened troubles overhung her father, Minnie arrived at home. Her welcome was a cool, if not a noisy one; for she was dear, as only daughters are dear, to her parents' hearts. But they worried about her pale face, and her melancholy ways, and strove diligently to discover what her ailment was.

"Didn't they feel ashamed of your rustic manners, little girl?" asked her father, secretly admiring the all too grace of her deportment.

"Not that I know of," replied she, smiling.

"Nor feed you on gruel, to make you delicate?"

"No."

"Nor take you to parties till you were tired," asked her mother—thinking that if they had, she must have been admired very much indeed.

"I did not go to parties very often."

"Well, you got a city bear, I suppose," remarked Frank—

who was at his father's half the time, now that Minnie was at home again.

"I have nothing but no for all your questions," said Minnie. "Ask me if I am glad to be at home—that I may say yes."

"Well," said her father, thinking to please her, "you'll be apt to be lonesome, after such fine times. I saw Harris up at Kanesville the other day, and asked him to come down. He's a good fellow, and welcome to my house."

a kind fellow, and were anxious to see
Minnie did not look as if she particularly wished to see
him—yet who shall say what thought was in her heart.

Mr. Willard occupied the time before the rains were over in going about among his neighbors and getting petitioners. Not one of them but put down his name, for they all believed in the justice of his cause, and he was a man liked by all who had any dealings with him. But his enemies were men of mighty influence, who could govern the opinions of an important class in the community.

The visit of Harris was considered very opportune, by Mr. Willard; and the gratification her father seemed to take in having him for "aid and counsel," just at that time, made the meeting between Minnie and himself less embarrassing than it might have been, under the mistake which separated them. Gratitude made Minnie exert herself to seem friendly; while pride, and some gentler sentiment too, compelled her to wear the same mask. Almost without ceasing, I tried to wear the same mask. He was adopted into the family as a son and brother.

But the foe Mr. Willard had battled was not over-mate and hints had been thrown out by some one, that violent measures were soon to be resorted to. A watch was set every night to guard the dam; an extra set of hands kept to do the fighting, if it came to that—and weapons of deadly import were kept ready for use.

The suspense of the family was painful—slept but a weary waiting for morning, and every day a dread. Several days passed in this way; and they began to hope that the rumor was an idle one, when one night the sleepless ear of Minnie caught the sound of some heavy iron implement striking against solid timbers.

Hurrying to her father's room, she wakened him by a touch. A part of the hands were sleeping in the house. The men were quickly aroused.

"Up, boys, and at 'em!" whispered Mr. Willard; "they're doing their devilish work. Take 'em over the head wherever you can catch 'em; but don't fire till I tell you."

When all was ready, a signal was made to the men in the mill, and all rushed out. There was just light enough to reveal the forms of men, and make it difficult to distinguish friend from foe.

The first charge of Mr. Willard's men came on with clubs, striking right and left among the invaders, causing diversion in their employment.

"Lay on, boys!—give the rascals plenty of it!" cried Mr. Willard, hims if striking at some one in the water.

"Let the water off through the race!" shouted one of the enemy. "We'll beat the d----d all in time yet!"

This had not been done before, evidently for fear of awakening the men who slept in the mill.

"The man that takes another step in this race, will lose his life by it!"

Mr. Willard's voice rang out strong and clear, and should have carried conviction with it of his purpose; but the intruders heeded it not.

"Fire on 'em, boys!"

This order would probably not have been given if there had been any hope of putting the enemy to flight by mere hand-blows; but a few seconds' time had a revealed to them that they

were both too numerous, and too resolute, to be overcome in a fight with clubs. The instant the order to fire was given, there was an almost simultaneous discharge of fire-arms; and the cries from the other side showed that some of the shots must have taken effect. At the same time, from their direction, came the flash and report of a pistol—intended, perhaps, for the owner of the mill. But in the instant's silence which followed the report, some one shouted:

"D—n that old man's soul! Why don't you catch him and put him in the creek?"

Having hurriedly dressed herself, Minnie had been standing on the piazza with her mother, too terribly frightened either for words or tears. Her attentive ear had caught every word of the different cries and shouts; and she distinctly heard the threat concerning her father. Forgetting her own danger and helplessness, she flew, rather than ran, until, having reached the bridge, which was in the midst of the contest, she cried in a voice whose shrill, pathetic alarm, thrilled every hearer's heart:

"Murderers! Men of violence and blood—lay not a finger on my father!"

At this instant a light appeared through the mill-room window, throwing its strong, bright beam athwart the scene, and showing where the young girl stood pale and resolute—unarmed but mighty.

"Whoever aims at my father's life, must take mine first!"—and seeing by the continual glare where he stood, she ran and clasped her arms about his form.

The pause created by Minnie's sudden appearance on the border of action, was now broken by a voice saying:

"Let the old man go then—for the girl's sake. There's not much more work on hand; the mill's on fire. Give the dam an' th' d--l!"

"Oh my God! curse them, and their posterity!" exclaimed Mr. Willard, with awful earnestness, and sunk back upon the ground. Minnie shrieked, calling upon her mother, Frank, Fletcher, Nut—in succession; but she knew not when some one came, for she had fainted.

The appalling sight of the mill on fire paralyzed the workmen. They stood in helpless, silent awe, gazing upon the

flames, while the invaders put the finishing stroke to their work of destruction. When they did think to try to recognize and identify them, they discovered that all were masks, and were otherwise so disguised as to prevent identification. Long before the flames had done their work, silence reigned over the scene of the late conflict—the ruthless invaders had fled—and only the wronged and suffering were left to the terrors of desolation.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OLD LOVE IN A NEW PHASE.

WHEN Minnie awakened to consciousness, she found herself in her own room, from which some one must have just gone, by the wet handkerchief lying on her forehead. The light of the conflagration made every thing clear as day. She roused herself, and sat up to look at the smoking building.

"Oh, my poor father!" she cried, "they have killed you!"

The door swung softly on its hinges, and the old woman entered—then seeing her sitting up and bitterly weeping, came to remark.

"Dear Minnie, your crop of trouble avails us. But be comforted. Your father is better—he will live—but Nat, I fear, can not get over it."

"And Nat, too!" moaned the distressed girl. "Poor Nat! Oh, how can I ever bear all this calamity?"

"There is *One*, Minnie, it is *He*, who bears our troubles for us, if we ask him. But you want some earthly comfort, poor child! Would that I could help you. Would that some one—the dearest to you on earth—were here to comfort you."

"My dearest, my all on earth, are here," replied Minnie; "but all need consolation, even more than I."

"You know what I mean, Minnie?" asked Fletcher, coming nearer, and listening for her reply.

"Yes, I know what you mean."

"And you have no brother here, who presence now would be balm to your stricken heart?"

"I have none!" sighed Minnie, leaning her head on her clasped hands, despairingly.

"Will you take me, then, darling?"

She sprang into his outstretched arms—sobbing for joy as much as grief.

"Oh, Fletcher! it was you I said I was enraged to;—for I felt that I was!"

"My own Minnie! was it so indeed? How blind and stupid I have been. But, my soul's love, let me alone for it now. Cast all your burdens upon me. Don't leave your room, dear, if you can not bear the agitation—for every thing more I say is already done; and you can not be of any assistance."

"My mother—how does she bear it?"

"Like a Christian hero—a martyr, rather; I do not think she wept."

"It is terrible—terrible!" said Minnie, shuddering. "I can not think that father will ever get over the blasting of all his hope—the destruction of a life's labor—for such it is, to him."

"You must know that he will, love. It is a heavy blow to him, and we must do all we can to make him less sensible of it. No doubt he will be quite ill—but the illness may save his mind from being shattered."

"How was Nat hurt?" asked Minnie, after a thoughtful silence.

"He was shot. I think that shot was intended for some one else; for it seems they were not generally armed. I was on deck; for it seems they were not generally armed. I was on deck; for it seems they were not generally armed. I was not in the beginning of the battle, because I could not believe they would go to such lengths as they did. But when I heard their desperate threats, and saw how promptly they exposed them, I made use of my pistols."

"Were any of their number killed?"

"I did not have time to ascertain—having my own friends to look after; but it's to be hoped there were. Such despachers are not fit to live."

"And, alas! not fit to die."

"As much as they ever will be. Life is thrown away like ~~useless~~ dust. But now, darling, I must leave you, to look after Nat."

"No; I will go too. I must see and thank him for his faithfulness. Is Frank here?"

"Yes—he and all the rest;—the burning mill gave them the alarm."

He put her out of his arms, where she had been nestled, as gently as though she were a babe.

"Look! the mill is falling in."

Minnie could not help crying again. To her the mill did not represent gold, or lands, or any thing material—she only saw in it the embodiment of her father's labors and hopes;—and there was the ruin.

They found Nat lying in the sitting-room in a chair. The ball had entered his lungs, traversing them diagonally, and the life-blood was continually streaming from his nostrils. He could no longer speak, even in a whisper. He had evidently been waiting to see Minnie, as the faint movement of his frame indicated.

"Poor Nat! poor Nat! I am so sorry for you!" she murmured, over him. "You were so kind and good—so faithful to all of us. And your sacrifice has saved my father, Nat. I know you will be glad of that; though we are so grieved to lose you."

The poor fellow was unable to utter what was in his thoughts; but he fixed his failing eyes on her face while she was speaking; and then with such an pathetic look, seemed to appeal to the slender gold chain around her neck.

Mrs. Gleeson, who was standing by, caught up a locket hanging even before Minnie.

"He wants you to wear it, all," she said.

"I will," whispered Minnie. "I will wear it always, for your sake."

He seemed quite satisfied, and withdrew his dying gaze. A few struggles more with the waves of the dark river, and the generous soul had reached the other side, to be no longer troubled with its own insufficiency, let us all hope.

The house was soon filled with the neighbors. The fire had informed all of the nature of the crisis existing at the mill-place. Great was their wrath and indignation, and many the offers of sympathy.

"We'll put every rascal of 'em in the Missouri if we can."

ketch," said one, whose demeanor showed how fully he spoke from his heart.

"An' we'll go to work and put up another mill ourselves, an' give it to him," said another, whose rough face expressed even more of kindness than his words.

"Gentlemen!"—Frank addressed them—"we thank you for your sympathy, and I know its sincere worth. But, whatever is done further in this sad business, must be done according to law. My father has always been a law-abiding man (cries of *that's so!*). He wishes for no violence, if the proper men could be taken—which is doubtful. He has been deeply wronged, (murmurs and threats,) and in a way which leaves the chance of gaining any requital extremely difficult—indeed, I do not think he will attempt it. Your proposal to rebuild the mill is generous, and like yourselves. Of that we can talk hereafter, if I can not persuade my father to give up business, altogether, which I hope to do. If some of you will attend to the funeral arrangements for Nathaniel Arnold, whom we all mourn, we shall feel under new obligations to you. More than this, you can not do for us, at this present time."

One afternoon, about a week after the funeral, Mr. Willard's arm-chair was brought before the fire, in its usual place, and he walked out of his bed-room, supported by Frank, to his usual seat in it.

"I declare, father," said Minnie, running to adjust the cushions, "it makes us feel quite cheerful to see you up again. We can not get along with you out of sight."

"Well, it's time I was up, Minnie. The old man's got to begin over again, after all," he answered, with a melancholy attempt at a smile.

A short silence followed the introduction of the dreary subject, broken only by a sob from Mrs. Willard.

"You needn't cry, Zara," he said; "I'm not going to build any more mills. You shall have your way now;—and the old man 'll try farming."

"Frank's got plenty o' farmin' tools," remarked Mrs. Gleason, ever ready to make a soothing or helpful suggestion.

"Yes, I can borrow Frank's tools, I reckon. I'll sell the horses and wagon and a pair of cattle, to pay the rest of my debts; and I can hire some of the neighbors round here to make fences, for another pair. I'll have one yoke left, to use on the place;—and Frank'll have to let me have a horse to plow with. You can begin to make a garden, Zara, along the creek-bank; and I'll have it fence right away."

The impression produced on his hearers by this exhibition of the old, indomitable spirit, was one of mixed pain and pleasure.

"If you would let us plan with you, father," said Frank, "we've got some suggestions to offer. I want to build a new house this summer, any way, you know; and I've laid over the lumber out at the yard, and picked out what I want. Now, I will be your tenant this year, if you like; and work out my lumber-bill on your place. I'm used to farming, and can furnish the necessary hands, by keeping out extra men. You can ride around, and learn the business if you like;—there's two ponies in the stable—and I think you'll be willing for company."

"Your plan is very good, Frank," said Minnie, smiling at him approvingly, "and very kind as far as it goes; but now,

but I have some schemes of my own, which I think best to mention here."

All eyes were directed toward Minnie—the idea of her having business schemes being quite amusing; and in fact she did blush very much, as she caught the curious glance of one particular pair.

"Why you must know, all of you," she began, half laughing, "that I believe myself to be quite an artist. That supposition granted, I wish to take rooms in Kanesville, and paint portraits. Of course everybody will patronize me; and I can earn money enough to do wonders on the farm!"

"Waal now! if that ain't a leetle the cutest idee, Minnie!" exclaimed Mrs. Gleason, admiringly.

"I'm much obliged to you, little girl," said her father, softly, "but I couldn't take your money. I haven't come to that yet, that my only daughter has to work to keep me a going. It is not much I've got to leave her when I die—nor much to gratify her with now—but it's our fortune, such as it is."

Fletcher Harris had not been an indifferent spectator of this family-council, into which he now ventured to introduce himself.

"Mr. Willard," said he, with a manly diffidence, "since I have been permitted to listen to a statement of your plans and prospects, I wish to make a proposal to you concerning the settlement of your daughter, toward whom you have so tender a regard. She has been so kind," he continued, taking her hand, and kissing her before him, "as to consent to be my wife. We had not talked of the time when our marriage—with your consent, and Mrs. Willard's—should take place; but I hope to persuade her, and you, to let it be consummated immediately."

The dead silence which followed was broken by Mr. Willard, saying in a pleased tone:

"Well, Harris, if I'd had the choosing of Minnie's husband I couldn't have got her a better one—that's my opinion. But I am not in any hurry to get her off my hands;—however, since it's you, and I like you, take her, whenever she consents."

Mrs. Willard expressed her gratification at Minnie's choice; and Frank gave his new brother a hearty shake of the hand,

saying, "he always knew little girlsie would come to some good fortune—simpletons always were lucky!"

Minnie smiled at her brother affably—she used to this sort of praise, and knowing it to be the height of satisfaction.

Quiet Olive only whispered a word of gratification; her mother openly expressed her surprise—not at the match—that was natural enough—but at her not having had any warning of the event.

"It's mighty curious that I never even dropped three candles in a row!"

That evening, when Fletcher and Minnie were having a private conversation on the piazza, in which the wedding-day was fixed, Fletcher chanced to notice the glint of the ornament she wore about her neck.

"Where did you get this trinket, Minnie?"

She related to him the story of Nat's twenty-dollar present and her promise to always wear it.

"Did you know, Minnie, that I was one of Nat's?"

"Indeed, when?"

"At the time of the flood, when you took such good care of him. I knew he loved you—and I did not know but you loved him. He was a fine-looking young fellow."

"I drove him into the water to help father, and he got his arm hurt, you know."

"And so you were making friends? Yes, I understand."

"I wonder if Charles will come down to our wedding?" said Minnie.

"Of course he will; I shall not take a refusal."

But Charles Lord did not come, and it was a very quiet wedding.

CHAPTER XIV.

RETRIBUTION.

LUD! there's our cellar all overflowed agin. I've had to wade up to my knees to git to the pork barrels, and the potatoes are all bobbin' about under water. It shows plain enough 'twan't Willard's dam that made our lot so wet, for the dam's done with, last spring, and here at the first fall rain we're as bad off as ever. I wish to goodness we'd stayed to York State, instid of tryin' the new country."

As the dissatisfied housewife communed thus with herself, she stepped to the open door and looked out, with that wearied, forlorn expression of face peculiar to women who have struggled with the difficulties of a new settlement. The storm which had roared and clamored all night, had been creeping off during the morning, and now the sunshine burst forth from its long restraint.

As she looked up and down the one long street of Railroad Town, she saw many one-story houses like her own, painted and unpainted, but all new, many set up on corner-stones or piles, and all looking so hurried of construction that the stray winds of the prairie might easily blow them away. Not many of her neighbors had ventured upon cellars, considering the ground as yet too wet; but Mrs. Buell was one of those housekeepers who couldn't "abide" getting along without a cellar, a well, and a cistern, and she had them all, much to the envy of those women whose husbands would not be troubled with providing these luxuries.

The first winter of their stay she had much enjoyment of the cellar, keeping her potatoes and cabbage nicely, while other people were complaining of theirs being frozen; but in the spring, there was vexation of spirit, and plenty of discomfort, in three feet of water in the cellar—water which stayed so long as to engender fever among her little ones, as well as to drown out the vegetables. The lowest part of the garden had also been a pool, just at the time when it would have been more desirable to have had it under control of spade and

hoe. When Mr. Buell complained to the land-agent who had sold him the lots, he was told that the trouble was all caused by back-water from Willard's mill-dam. Other neighbors, in the same condition, and regretting, like Mr. Buell, that they had "pitched their tents" in Railroad Town, were consoled with the same story, and they had naturally felt an eager desire to abate the nuisance. They had enjoyed the fulfillment of that desire; they had destroyed an old man's darling, and some one of them had the weight of murder on his soul.

And now the fall rains had come; and, as Mrs. Buell that day discovered, her cellar was as full of water as ever before, while Willard's mill could no longer be chargeable with the damage.

As she stood looking down the street, longing in her heart for her old home in York State, and thinking how unfinished every thing appeared, and how dreary it was to be wading about, up to her knees in water, to obtain the requisites for dinner, a woman came out of the opposite house, with a cup in her hand, and crossed over the street.

"Good morning, Mrs. Buell. I come to see if you could lend me a little pearl-ash, and a drawing of tea. I'm out; and Jim's run off, the little rascal, and I've no one to send to the store. 'Pears to me you're looking kind of down—hope none of the young ones are sick."

"No, there's none of them sick, thank you. Step in, Mrs. Mason—I was just thinking about old times—how easy they were—in York State. We new settlers have to rough it—but I s'pose our children will enjoy the fruits of our labors. Somehow, I'm disappointed in this place—sorry we settled here. I wish Buell had gone on further."

"And I wish Mason had. It's a low, unhealthy place. The way them speculators lied is awful. If we could sell out, without losing, we'd try a new place. It's all mire and water around the back-door—just as bad as it was last spring."

"So old man Willard had his property destroyed for nothing. For my part, I never approved of them doings. I'm glad Buell wasn't among 'em, that night. *His* hands are free of blood."

The neighbor to whom this speech was addressed colored up and looked uneasy.

"Yes," she responded, "it was too bad. I wish my brother hadn't been among 'em. Seems to me he hasn't been the same man since."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Buell, taking note of the sudden embarrassment which oppressed her visitor.

"I don't know, unless he worries too much about the death of that young man. Not that he had a hand in it," she added, hastily, "but to think there was blood shed by any one. He'd no idea there would be, or he'd have stayed to home."

"I think I've heard there was a grudge held by your brother against Nat Arnold. Didn't Nat knock him down, once, in the tavern?"

"Nonsense. Who could have been talking such stuff? If it won't be putting you out any, I'll be obliged to you for the pearlash and tea, Mrs. Buell. I'm in something of a hurry, as I've got to make biscuits for dinner."

"It's queer she should have been so flustered," pondered Mrs. Buell, after the departure of her neighbor. "He's a terrible, reckless, wicked fellow, her brother is; and much as I like Mrs. Mason, if I knew it was he who shot poor Nat, I'd make it known to the authorities. I used to see Nat Arnold often when he was building our house; he brought us the lumber; and a handsomer, more obliging and good young man I scarcely ever knew. It went through me like a clap of thunder when I heard he was killed. I can't be thankful enough to think Buell didn't go along."

That day, when her husband came home to dinner, she mentioned to him the suspicions which were still weighing on her mind.

"I never had a doubt of it, for my part," said he. "I saw him next morning, and he looked like a murderer. Besides, to tell you the truth, wife, which you mustn't mention to any one, I happened to see him handling a pistol in his room that morning. I was up early, and our window being right across from theirs, I saw him locking it up in his trunk. He had his clothes on, all wet and dirty, and his bed hadn't been slept in. He acted excited, as if he couldn't keep still a minute, sitting down and jumping up, and walking around. I didn't know then whether his victim was dead or not. You see, I was in the bar-room, the time Nat Arnold

knocked him down for speaking of Willard's daughter. He was terribly angry then. "He's one of those kind of men who are dangerous when they bear a grudge. I s'pose the young man was a beau of the girl's, and resented having her spoke of in a bar-room."

"Poor young man," sighed the matron, "and now she's married to a grand husband, and forgot all about him."

"It was a wanton and unprovoked murder," continued Mr. Buell, "and I don't wonder the one who did it looks uneasy as a fish out of water, ever since. Such a fellow as Mark Poole is no credit to a community, and I wish he'd quit ours. For my part, I consider the whole affair of the firing of the mill as a lawless outrage. I'm right glad I refused to have a hand in it."

"I'm right glad you did, husband."

"It's strange how folks that were quiet and law-abiding at the East, get so reckless out here," mused Mr. Buell, shoving back his chair from the table, and putting his hand on the little tow-head, resting against his knee.

"It's only the bad ones that does, husband. They'd have been bad there, if they'd had opportunity. It's the want of the old ties to bind 'em down—and the recklessness of speculation, too; and getting careless of what folks think of them, and hopes of getting rich in a month or a year. And then there's a great many wild ones come West, just because they—"

The matron's philosophizing was brought to an abrupt termination by the return of the visitor of the morning, who, this time, came flying in with a horrified face, that caused the family to spring to their feet at the sight.

"Come over—come over, and help me!"

"What is it?"

"Oh, it's Mark! oh, dreadful! I can't bear it!"

She wrung her hands, and started back, hardly looking to see if they followed her.

"What's happened to him?" again asked her neighbor, as he overtook her in the middle of the street.

"He's been killed—almost—crushed in the mill. Oh, Mr. Buell, come and see if you can help him. Mason's gone for the doctor."

If Mrs. Buell had not been a woman of strong nerves, averse in her to facing emergencies, she would have turned from the sight of the torn and dying man, who lay upon the bed in the front-room, moaning out the last few moments of his life. It was awful to see him, especially as nothing could be done to save him or mitigate his pain. He was, so the doctor declared, as soon as he arrived, mortally injured—a mortal ruin, from which it was only to be hoped that suffering would speedily pass.

It seems that he had gone to look at the machinery of a new steam-mill which had just been completed, and in which he had an interest—the first steam-mill in that section of the country, and expected to make the fortunes of its owners; he had gone to see its first working, and on the very day and morning of its beginning work, by some fatal accident had been caught in the machinery, and ruthlessly whirled and ground to destruction.

Mrs. Mason sat with her face hidden on Mrs. Buell's shoulder; she could not look at her brother without going into nervous spasms. Since he could do nothing for the dying man, the physician turned his attention to her, administering a sedative. The neighbors gathered in.

After a few moments, the sufferer, who had been partially unconscious of his pangs, opened his eyes, with a terrible look on his white face:

"It's my punishment," he said, in a distinct voice.

"Oh, Mark! oh, my brother!" screamed Mrs. Mason, flying to his side when she heard him speak so almost calmly and naturally.

"Yes, Martha, Nat Arnold is avenged."

"Oh, don't say so, Mark."

"But I did. I killed him, deliberately, and with malice aforethought. That's why this has come upon me. I helped fire Willard's mill, and then I thought to prosper in my own. But God wouldn't have such doings—I warn you all, God wouldn't have such doings."

His eyes roved about the room, meeting those of more than one man who had been with him on that night of arson and murder. Though the crime of the others had not equaled his, yet they suffered beneath the presence of a swift retribution.

"He's out of his head," sobbed his sister, striving even then to conceal from the world her brother's guilt.

"No, I'm not. 'Twont do to lie now."

His face was gray with death, but he made another effort to speak.

"Make up the old man's loss to him."

"Yes, yes," answered Mr. Buell, hoping to soothe the trouble of the departing soul.

Like the ashes from which the living fire has smouldered out, became the face of the dying man—of the dead. With a great cry the sister fell in the arms of her husband, who carried her from the room.

The sudden and frightful death of Mark Poole made a deep impression on the community. The fact that he had acknowledged the shooting of young Arnold was not regarded with much severity, as it had always been laid at his door; his cruel death excited pity; and there were those who sneered at the idea of any retributive providence in the manner of it; other men had been crushed in mill-machinery who were not murderers—and so they have; it is not for man to sit in judgment on man. If the victim himself had not felt and pointed out the seeming hand of an avenging Power, it is probable that others would hardly have dwelt upon it.

Certain it is, that conscience was stirred among some of the rioters; for Mr. Willard, within a month after the grave had closed over Mark Poole, received anonymously a sum of money which made his projects for the future more easy of execution.

It was not in his indomitable nature to endure defeat; the same resolution which had carried him through every vicissitude attending his favorite idea, until the final total ruin of his property, now fixed itself upon another and most promising project.

It was a project which required time to fully develop; and we shall see in our next chapter how he prospered in it.

Mrs. Buell did not put up with a pond for a garden, and a fever-breeding pool for a cellar, another season. Inducements were held out, in another direction, which persuaded her husband to go to all the trouble and expense of another removal.

However, they took their house with them, like tortoises, not exactly on their own backs, but on a wheeled contrivance drawn by several pairs of stout oxen, and when they set it down, it was over as dry and healthy a cellar as the good Lonswife coull wish. The Buells were not the only family who deserted the city of mud, taking their dwellings with them—and thus it chanced that evil-doers met the reward of their evildoings, surgesting again and forever the time-proven adage that honesty is the best policy.

CHAPTER XV.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

"THAT's the smoke of a boat around that bend, yonder. She'll be here in fifteen minutes," said the agent at the Phoenix landing, to a venerable man seated in a handsome carriage, b'lin' a pair of handsome horses.

"I hope we shall not be disappointed," remarked the dark-eyed, pensive-looking elderly lady, at his side.

"Them's a nice pair of horses of yours, Mr. Willard," pursued the attentive agent.

"Yes, sir, these are fine horses; but they're getting a little old, though they don't show it."

"T'was up to the Grove, owned 'em a while, didn't he?"

"Well, he *had* them a short time; that was when I was pretty tight cramp'd for money, and I put the horses in his hands. But my son-in-law wouldn't see them go for debt; an' he just made me a present of them, when he married my daughter, an' I have drove them ever since."

"Is it them you're expecting to-day? There comes the boat—the *Sister Seven*, and a pretty boat she is. See how nicely she rounds to!"

A dozen or two passengers came off, among them a party which our friends immediately recognized, and so no doubt does the reader. Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher, and Mr. and Mrs. Stewart nurse and children, and Charles Lord, bachelor.

"Jump right in here, Minnie, and that pretty boy of yours. There's room for one more; come, Harris, get in here, and let the other carriage come up for the rest."

It was a merry procession which drove through the woods that June morning. Husbands and fathers though they were, the gentlemen tossed their hats and shouted like boys; and the ladies and children chatted like magpies.

"Ith thith my grandpa?" asked little Charlie Harris. "What a white beard he'th got."

"Yes, it's white enough, my boy! And the old man is getting helpless, though he can drive his own team yet. But never mind, Charlie—he'll leave your mamma and you something worth while, one of these days. Phœnix City is taking the lead, I tell you!"

"How changed every thing is!" exclaimed Minnie, as they came in sight of the prairie.

"Yes, it is very different from the prairie of five years ago. All made into farms, clean up to my town; and all around it too."

"Mi-souri City don't make much of a show from here," said Fletcher.

"No; nor from any other place. Quick as ever I laid off my town, up here on the dry prairie, their concern went down faster than my dam did—one night, you may remember. Never was such a mad set of men. They invented all the lies they could, to keep the people away from here; but when folks saw what a nice place I had, and that I wasn't overflowed every time it rained, and that this was the best way to make a road to the river, and a road up and down the bottom, they didn't stop long up there, in the mud. Why, two-thirds of the whole town moved down here the first summer; and there's more been coming in from everywhere, ever since."

"I don't know where to look for the old place," said Minnie.

"Well, you could not see the house, for trees, any way. Your mother worried me continually about trees; so I got a couple of hundred, of different sorts, and set them out, all over the place, except what land was wanted for a garden; and then I made an orchard."

"This is your home, Charlie," said Mrs. Willard, as the carriage entered a pleasant avenue leading up to the house, which Minnie now recognized.

Fletcher sprung out and offered his assistance.

"No, no, Harris! Help the women out; I can get out of a carriage alone, for a while yet."

"What a pretty spot it is!" cried Mrs. Stewart, as she alighted on the piazza. "And just to think, Minnie, that we came high living roasted alive, out where these pleasant-looking farms lie."

"There'll be a railroad along on this ridge, in a year or two," remarked her husband; "and you will get a fine station here, in spite of the Railroad Town, in which I own a share."

"You needn't feel bad about it, Stewart," replied Mr. Willard, with a broadly beaming smile; "you will find a deed for a share in Phoenix City, under your plate, at dinner; and so will your wife; and so will Minnie and her husband; and Little Charlie and his cousin Charles!"

"And nothing for my girls?" asked Constance, when the clamor of thanks was over.

"They'll see, when they come to dinner!"

"How prettily they furnish up my parlor!"

Fletcher and Minnie had been busy all the morning in unpacking and hanging a set of elegantly-framed paintings, done by Minnie's own hand, for her mother's house; and now the company were admitted to inspect and admire.

"This one was declared a beauty in its way; and two fine portraits of Minnie and her husband were especially admired. "But this one," said Minnie, pointing to a large and handsomely painted picture, "is Fletcher's favorite. He *would* have me paint this from a pencil-drawing he made a long time ago, which he calls 'The Fawn of the Prairie!'"

"It's all that is left of such scenes now," returned Fletcher. "Excepting the *dead* creature who represents the Fawn," added Charles Lord.

Minnie joined in the laugh at her expense; after which she was saying she was "so glad father's property had turned out so well," when an elderly man in black, remarked:

"I always said, man's accidents is God's purposes."

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